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JOHN KEATS





# JOHN KEATS

## *A STUDY*

BY

F. M. OWEN

---

*'His clenched hand shall unclose at last,  
I know, and let out all the beauty.  
My poet holds the Future fast,  
Accepts the coming ages' duty,  
Their Present for this Past'*

ROBERT BROWNING

LONDON

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## *PREFACE.*

I HAVE not tried to write a Life of John Keats: anyone who has read Lord Houghton's comprehensive and appreciative Memoir would feel that to do so would be an impertinence.

True lovers of Keats will have to forgive me. My work, except perhaps as an attempt to make others love him, will have small value for them. All, and far more than I have said, they will have known before, and they will possibly feel it weakened in the saying, for

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter.

But because I have felt most praise has missed that which to me is his highest beauty, and because he is so often quoted in a fragmentary

way, which robs him of his human interest, I have tried to express what Keats has taught me, knowing well that if I have mistaken or misinterpreted him, or if any words of mine have dimmed his beauty, his large heart would have been the first to forgive me.

FRANCES M. OWEN.

*February, 1880.*

# JOHN KEATS.

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## I.

Oh, what a wild and harmonised tune  
My spirit struck from all the beautiful.—ENDYMION.

IN all true poetry there is an element of prophecy, an inner vision, the scope of which is not, and ought not to be, comprehended at once. The real harmony which will make the poetry of John Keats lasting is to be found in this prophetic element. For a work of genius is the expression of a mind at its greatest, a mind no longer limited and fettered with its own individuality, but free and great by reason of its union with general life. It is the voice of the many in one, of the one in many, and such a voice must by its very nature be prophetic. The true harmony of it will lie not only in

metrical sweetness and melodious words, but in the reconciliation of 'discordant elements' by 'the dark inscrutable workmanship of life,' the realisation of the relations of the spirit to its surroundings, the expansiveness of its sympathy, and its hopes for humanity.

Keats is too often remembered as the poet of sensuous perfection, to the exclusion of this wider thought, but any careful study of his poems will make it obvious that while he is pre-eminently among English poets the one who appeals most directly to the senses, his work is full of indications that his imagination and poetic genius carried him beyond this first and earliest development of the mind to the spiritual and more permanent elements of human nature; and that however 'wild' the music may have been which his 'spirit struck 'from all the beautiful,' it bore in its harmony the undertone of the discords necessary to its completion and fulness.

'The still sad music of humanity' was beautiful to him, as well as the gladness and joy of life, and he felt 'the giant agony of the world' while he gloried in the melody of its progress.

The sensuous faculties are the first to be developed, and in Keats they were developed to an unusual extent, probably by reason of the large scale of his whole nature ; for it must never be forgotten that his life was an arrested one, that his poetry remains to us a Titanic fragment of that which might have been the unrivalled work of genius of our age, and that the three small volumes of verse which he left us, with the memory of his twenty-five years of life, are but a prelude to the music which never was played.

The perfection of his senses, the luxuriance of his imagination, the strength of his friendship, the warmth of his affections, and the depth of his passion, are sufficient warrant to us for believing that the melody and creative beauty so much associated with him are but a partial expression of his general power, and that we are coming only by slow degrees to know the worth of his legacy of verse and the greatness of the elements which it contains.

The short sad story of his life is too well known already to need more than the briefest recapitulation in order to understand the sequence of his poems.



The son of a man employed in a livery-stable, he was born in October 1795, in London. His father died when John was only nine years old, but his mother gave him what was considered a good education. She is said to have been a stern and severe woman, yet when she died, during her son's school career, we are told that he hid himself for several days in a nook under the master's desk, 'passionately inconsolable.'

His schoolmaster, Mr. Cowden Clarke, was one of his earliest friends, and to Mr. Clarke's son Charles<sup>1</sup> he wrote, in one of those strange rhyming letters which show his versatility and command of language :—

. . . You first taught me all the sweets of song,  
The grand, the sweet, the terse, the free, the fine,  
What swell'd with pathos, and what right divine ;  
Spenserian vowels that elope with ease,  
And float along like birds o'er summer seas ;  
Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness,  
Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness.  
Who read for me the sonnet swelling loudly  
Up to its climax, and then dying proudly ?

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<sup>1</sup> In some interesting *Personal Recollections of John Keats*, published by Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1874, we see how close this friendship continued to be after the school days of Keats were over.

Who found for me the grandeur of the ode,  
Growing, like Atlas, stronger from its load ?  
Who let me taste that more than cordial dram,  
The sharp, the rapier-pointed epigram ?  
Showed me that epic was of all the king,  
Round, vast, and spanning all, like Saturn's ring ?

For I have long time been my fancy feeding  
With hopes that you would one day think the reading  
Of my rough verses not an hour misspent :  
Should it e'er be so, what a rich content.

This letter is dated September 1816, the year before 'Endymion' was written.

For five years Keats prepared himself for the medical profession. It is strange how little trace we find of this work in his poems. It would seem as if he had been living a double life at the time, and that while he walked the hospitals his mind was straying in the old classic fields or in 'the realms of gold' of Spenser's faery world ; for neither science, nor the mechanism of the body, nor the subtle connection of the body and mind, ever seem to have specially touched his imagination. The two principal inspirations of his early life were Spenser's 'Faery Queene' and a translation of Homer by Chapman ; which last was to him

such an intense delight, that he read it all night long, even shouting aloud when some special passage struck him. He knew no Greek. His marvellous knowledge of Greek mythology came through translations and his own innate sympathy with Greek feeling ; and great as the loss of not having mastered the language itself must have been, there was certainly a compensating gain in the fresh appreciative power which had not been injured by the hackneying of the Greek poets in school work. How great the joy of this discovery of Homer was to him is well known by the sonnet written on this occasion.

*SONNET ON READING CHAPMAN'S HOMER.*

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen,  
Round many Western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne ;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken ;  
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise,  
Silent—upon a peak in Darien.

The realms of Chaucer and of Spenser had been a veritable land of Havilah to him, but this first dawn of Greek beauty was a joyous inspiration, equalled only by one other feeling in his life. For he was himself a Greek born in the after time, in as far as the longing for perfection in beauty, the culture of the senses, the responsiveness to nature, the spontaneous appreciation of all sensuous objects of enjoyment, could make him one. But 'Pan is dead,' and Keats was weighted with the modern spirit of change and of that restlessness which must necessarily belong to all transition and progress. He could not 'lull himself into immortality,' in his dreams of beauty, untouched by the suffering on every side of him: he could not be content with things as they were: he looked forward to a brighter future for the world he loved so keenly and understood so well.

And other spirits there are standing apart,  
Upon the forehead of the age to come;  
These, these will give the world another heart  
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum  
Of mighty workings!  
Listen awhile, ye nations, and be dumb.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sonnet to Haydon.

In London he met with friends who appreciated him and fostered his talent. Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, Godwin, Shelley, &c., were all good and true to him, and it is pleasant to think that the few years he lived were filled with their love. Although his face was strong and manly, one of his friends writes of it: 'There was 'in the character of his countenance the femineity which Coleridge thought to be the mental 'constitution of true genius.' Another says: 'His 'countenance lives in my mind as one of singular 'beauty and brightness; it had the expression as 'if he had been looking on some glorious sight.'

In 1817, as his health was not good, he went to the Isle of Wight, and there began to write 'Endymion,' for he had a strong feeling that every true poet ought to write some long piece. 'True lovers of poetry,' he said, 'like to have a 'little region to wander in, and a long poem is a 'test of *invention*,' which he took to be 'the polar 'star of poetry.'

At the time of its publication 'Endymion' was but a partial success. It was not of the ephemeral character which commands instantaneous popularity. Critics in the 'Quarterly'

and 'Blackwood' wrote down the new young poet. The 'Quarterly' confessed it had not read 'Endymion,' but proceeded to review it, and stamped it as 'unintelligible, rugged, diffuse, 'tiresome, and absurd ;' and thought it unlikely that Mr. Keats 'had put his real name to such 'a rhapsody.' 'Blackwood' committed itself to writing of 'the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiotcy of "Endymion,"' and even went so far as to prophesy that no bookseller would venture £50 a second time on anything Keats could write ; ending with the assertion that it 'is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet.'

The coarse and superficial character of such criticism could not fail to jar upon the exquisite refinement and sensitiveness of such a mind as his ; but Keats did not die of these 'baaing 'vanities' and 'tiptop nothings,' as has sometimes been affirmed. It is impossible that if they had had sufficient power to touch his vitality he could have written of them as he did. 'This is a mere 'matter of the moment. I think I shall be among 'the English poets after my death. It does me not 'the least harm in society to make me appear little

'and ridiculous. I know when a man is superior to me, and give him all due respect—*he will be the last to laugh at me.*' And again: 'Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works.' It only shows that Shelley and his other friends had not fathomed the depth and strength of Keats if they believed that a man who could write the preface to 'Endymion' and the opening lines of the third book, could die of the 'Quarterly Review.'

The 'Edinburgh Review' was fairer, and confessed that "'Endymion" was at least as full of genius as of absurdity.' But Keats knew himself that 'his poem had not at all succeeded.' Yet he adds: 'I have no doubt of success in a course of years, if I persevere; but I must be patient, for the reviewers have enervated men's minds and made them indolent: few think for themselves.' And in another letter of about the same time: 'J. S. is perfectly right in regard to "the slipshod 'Endymion.'" That it is so is no fault of mine. No; though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous

'about its being a perfect piece, and with that  
'view asked advice, and trembled over every  
'page, it would not have been written: for it is  
'not in my nature to fumble. I will write in-  
'dependently. I have written independently  
'without judgment, I may write independently  
'and with judgment hereafter. The genius of  
'Poetry must work out its own salvation in a  
'man. It cannot be matured by law and pre-  
'cept, but by sensation and watchfulness of itself.  
'That which is creative must create itself. In  
'"Endymion" I leaped into the sea, and thereby  
'have become better acquainted with the sound-  
'ings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had  
'stayed upon the green shore and piped a silly  
'pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I  
'was never afraid of failure, for I would sooner  
'fail than not be among the greatest.' Thus  
was 'Endymion' launched amidst the condem-  
nation of the ignorant many, the guarded ap-  
preciation of the enlightened few, and in  
humility by its writer, who knew not how  
prophetic of itself were its opening words:—

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ;  
Its loveliness increases ; it will never  
Pass into nothingness.



By this time the medical profession was renounced, and Keats had given himself up to poetry and to love, for he had met Fanny Brawne, and life was changed to him as only an absorbing passion could change it. Hitherto the women who had chiefly influenced him seem to have been his sister Fanny and his sister-in-law, the wife of George Keats. Of the latter he says, in a letter written to her and to his brother out in America: 'The moon is now shining full and  
' brilliant: she is the same to me in matter  
' that you are in spirit. If you were here, my  
' dear sister, I could not pronounce the words  
' which I can write to you from a distance. I  
' have a tenderness for you, and an admira-  
' tion, which I feel to be as great and more  
' chaste than I can have for any woman in  
' the world. You will mention Fanny.' Her  
' character is not formed, her identity does not  
' press upon me as yours does. I hope, from  
' the bottom of my heart, I may one day feel  
' for her as much as I do for you. I know  
' not how it is, my dear brother, I have never  
' made any acquaintance of my own, nearly all

<sup>1</sup> His sister.

‘through your medium: through you I know  
‘not only a sister, but a glorious human being.’

There can be little doubt that this sister-in-law was one of the pure and beautiful influences at work in his mind when he wrote ‘Endymion.’ It is as impossible not to feel the shadowy presence of a high ideal throughout its pages, as it is in ‘Lamia’ not to feel the presence of a woman loved with feverish passion and restless dissatisfaction. But in this same letter Keats goes on to mention having met a lady who had deeply impressed him. ‘She is not a Cleopatra, ‘but she is at least a Charmian; she has a rich ‘Eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into the room, she ‘makes the same impression as the beauty of a ‘leopardess. . . . She kept me awake one night, ‘as a tune of Mozart’s might do. I speak of ‘the thing as a pastime and amusement, than ‘which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very “Yes” ‘and “No” of whose life is to me a banquet. . . ‘She is a fine thing, speaking in a worldly way, ‘for there are two distinct tempers of mind in ‘which we judge of things—the worldly, theatrical,

' and pantomimical ; and the uncarthly, spiritual,  
' and ethereal. In the former, Buonaparte, Lord  
' Byron, and this Charmian hold the first place  
' in our minds : in the latter, John Howard,  
' Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and  
' you, my dear sister, are the conquering feelings.  
' As a man of the world, I love the rich talk of  
' a Charmian ; as an eternal being, I love the  
' thought of you. I should like her to ruin me,  
' and I should like you to save me.

I am free from men of pleasure's cares,  
By dint of feelings far more deep than theirs.

' This is Lord Byron's, and is one of the finest  
' things he has said.'

In his Memoir of Keats, Lord Houghton quotes this passage as referring to Fanny Brawne, but Mr. Buxton Forman, in editing the letters of Keats to Fanny Brawne, brings some proof to show that it refers to some one else. The real value of the passage lies in the spiritual and refined appreciation which it shows Keats had for his sister-in-law, and the description of 'Charmian' is certainly very like that which is given of Miss Brawne in a letter written a month or two later. 'She is about my height, with a

'fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort :  
'she wants sentiment in every feature ; she  
'manages to make her hair look well ; her nostrils  
'are very fine though a little painful ; her mouth  
'is bad and good ; her profile is better than her  
'full face, which indeed is not full, but pale and  
'thin, without showing any bone ; her shape is very  
'graceful, and so are her movements ; her arms  
'are good, her hands bad-ish, her feet tolerable.'

His letters to her, which have lately been published, give an impression of passionate suffering love without rest or calm, claiming no sympathy with his higher life ; for his poetry, which was his true life, is rarely mentioned, and he seems content with pouring out an elemental worship of beauty as embodied in her whom he loved. He became engaged to her, but he had not money enough to enable him to marry, and he loved and suffered with the intensity which belongs to such a nature as his :—a glimpse into such suffering sometimes startles an easy-going world into a momentary consciousness of a heaven and hell in the midst of its every-day life, of which it goes on its unheeding way in profoundest ignorance.

By this time the great fragment 'Hyperion' was begun. It was probably the first version of it, which Keats says was given up because 'there were too many Miltonic inversions in it,' and he did not live to finish the second.

It was to this effort he makes allusion in the Preface to 'Endymion.' 'I hope I have not in 'too late a day touched the beautiful mythology 'of Greece, and dulled its brightness, for I wish 'to try once more before I bid it farewell.' And in the last book of 'Endymion' itself, the line,

Thy lute-voiced brother will I sing ere long,  
evidently refers to Apollo in the third book of 'Hyperion.'

It was of 'Hyperion' that Lord Byron, who was not disposed to do Keats full justice, wrote: 'It seems actually inspired by the Titans and 'sublime as Æschylus;' and Shelley said, 'I 'consider the fragment of "Hyperion" as second 'to nothing that was ever produced by a writer 'of the same years.'

The 'Eve of Saint Agnes,' 'The Pot of Basil, some of the odes, and 'Lamia,' were written about this time; and a tragedy called 'Otho the 'Great' was composed in partnership with a

friend, and seems to lack the peculiar genius and inspiration of Keats altogether.

A Highland tour, a visit to Shanklin, a sojourn in Winchester, a more prolonged residence in Hampstead, and the death of his brother Tom, whom he nursed to the end, seem to make up the few circumstances of the period of his literary life ; and then the shadows begin to fall rapidly, and the sunlight is broken off abruptly and for ever. Money troubles pressed upon the young poet, and in the autumn of 1819 his health gave way altogether, and he broke a blood-vessel. 'That is my death-warrant,' he said, when he saw the blood. 'I must die.'

For a while he partially rallied, and cast about for something to do. The choice seemed to lie between going to South America or being surgeon on an Indiaman. He inclined to the latter scheme, but consumptive signs came on rapidly, and he was ordered abroad. The artist Severn went with him, and the devotion and self-abnegation of this friend, and the kindness of Sir James Clark, then a doctor in Rome, are the only gleams of light which break through the gloom of the end. From Naples

Keats wrote to one of his friends : ' It surprises  
' me that the human heart is capable of con-  
' taining and bearing so much misery.' With  
what mournfully prophetic power must the  
words of the sad princess in his own ' Endy-  
' mion ' have come back to him :—

Yet I would have, great gods, but one short hour  
Of native air. Let me but die at home.

From Rome, at the end of November 1820, he  
wrote his last letter, which ends thus :—' If I  
' recover I will do all in my power to correct  
' the mistakes I made during sickness, and if I  
' should not, all my faults will be forgiven. Write  
' to George as soon as you receive this, and tell  
' him how I am as far as you can guess, and  
' also a note to my sister, who walks about my  
' imagination like a ghost, she is so like Tom.  
' I can scarcely bid you good-bye even in a  
' letter. I always made an awkward bow. God  
' bless you.—JOHN KEATS.'

The story of those days of dying is chiefly a  
story of pain : ' the sense of darkness coming over  
' him,' ' the eternal vision of her whom he loved  
' eternally vanishing ;' and his friend Severn  
praying by his side ' that some angel of good-

'ness may yet lead him through this dark  
'wilderness.' His thoughts grew calmer as death  
came near. He 'felt the daisies growing over  
'him,' he said. He begged that a letter and  
purse of his sister's, and a letter of his beloved's  
might be put into his coffin, and that his epitaph  
might be, 'Here lies one whose name was writ  
'in water.' When death actually took him, his  
last words were, 'Thank God it has come.' He  
is buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome,  
where the flowers grow over him all the year  
round.

Peace, peace, he is not dead, he doth not sleep!  
He hath awakened from the dream of life.  
'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep  
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,  
And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife  
Invulnerable nothings. *We* decay  
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief  
Convulse us and consume us day by day,  
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night,  
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
And that unrest which men miscall delight  
Can touch him not, and torture not again.  
From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
He is secure; and now can never mourn  
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;  
Nor when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,  
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.



## II.

THE sadness of this short life-story seems to stand out in sharp contrast to the joyous character of much of the poetry of Keats, for, until blighted by disease, joyousness was a distinct feature of his many-sided nature, a joyousness which keenly appreciated all natural delights and all pleasant sensations; which brought the undertone of music into 'Endymion,' the triumph into 'Hyperion,' the completed happiness into the 'Eve of St. Agnes,' the fairy fun into the 'Cap and Bells,' and the Greek feeling into all 'his handling of nature.'

Mr. Matthew Arnold particularises four ways of handling nature, two of which ways he attributes to Keats, viz.,<sup>1</sup> the 'Greek lightness and 'brightness,' and 'the charm and magic.' Keats in these respects has more sympathy with

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on Celtic Literature. Lect. vi.

Shakespeare than with any of our other poets, possessing the same power of bringing to us in a few words all that sight, smell, or touch could carry away from anything beautiful, and weaving it into the very tissue of the memory, to abide with us as a possession. He draws no lessons from it, he points no morals; he simply leads us with a magical expression into the close sympathy which he has himself with nature, and makes it live for us as it does for him. He is penetrated by it in some measure as the Greeks were, and gives us its essence in his own nature. With two or three words of charm, he creates an atmosphere around the creatures of his imagination and makes them live, never lowering nature to their moods or his own, but harmonising all moods with nature. It is thus that he has left us such a wealth of complete word-pictures. We seem to be with him on the

Swelling downs, where sweet air stirs  
Blue harebells lightly, and where prickly furze  
Buds lavish gold.

We stand upon the little hill and see the pure  
white clouds, 'like flocks new-shorn.'

Sweetly they slept  
On the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept  
A little noiseless noise among the leaves,  
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.

We feast our tired eyes upon 'the wideness of  
'the sea,' and watch

The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

We wander through the

green evening quiet in the sun  
O'er many a heath, through many a woodland dun,  
Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight dreams  
The summer time away.

We linger with him enchanted where,

Upon a tranced summer night  
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,  
Tall oaks, branch charmed by the earnest stars,  
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,  
Save from one gradual solitary gust,  
Which comes upon the distance and dies off,  
As if the ebbing air had but one wave.

We see his filbert hedge overtwined with wild  
briar, and find

the quaint mossiness of aged roots,  
Round which is heard a springhead of clear waters,  
Babbling so wildly of its lovely daughters,  
The spreading bluebells.

We gather into our loneliness those

undescribed sounds  
That come a-swooning over hollow grounds,  
And wither drearily on barren moors.

We listen to the

Distant harvest-carols clear,  
Rustle of the reaped corn,  
Sweet birds antheming the morn.

Or the nightingale sings to us

Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Whatever the picture or the sound may be, it is touched with the same charm, it is described truly, but it is given an added radiance, and a subtler power than we should have found in it.

His ear for words was keen and fine, and produced combinations which would in themselves give him a high rank among English poets. More of the lines of condensed beauty and melody which linger in our minds are from Keats than we easily recognise, and those who love his poems have an almost irresistible desire to read them aloud, even when alone, for the sake of their music.

A short and exquisite example of his melody may be quoted in this little Faery Song.

Shed no tear ! Oh, shed no tear !  
The flower will bloom another year.  
Weep no more ! Oh, weep no more !  
Young buds sleep in the root's white core.  
Dry your eyes ! Oh, dry your eyes !  
For I was taught in Paradise  
To ease my breast of melodies.

Shed no tear !

Overhead ! look overhead !  
'Mong the blossoms white and red,  
Look up, look up. I flutter now  
On this flush pomegranate bough.  
See me ; 'tis this silvery bill  
Ever cures the good man's ill.  
Shed no tear ! Oh, shed no tear !  
The flower will bloom another year.  
Adieu, adieu— I fly, adieu,  
I vanish in the heaven's blue.

Adieu, adieu !

But to linger over this melodious and creative beauty in Keats, is but to reiterate what every one is ready to acknowledge, that if this alone accounted for his high place among the English poets, it is already done. He has a stronger hold on our minds, from the greatness of the thoughts which he was always striving to express, than from his recognised power of expression.

However partially it was developed, owing

to his untimely fate, the idea which underlies his poetry most deeply is that of the *oneness* of all true life.

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,

was the lesson written for him on the Grecian urn, a lesson which bound the glorious Greek past with the sadder English present, and which he said would still remain 'the friend of man' in midst 'of other woe than ours.' And the words have an intensity of meaning which nothing but the gradual unfolding of life can reveal to us. For our eyes see but dimly and learn but slowly to know what is beauty, or to realise that what is beautiful to God can only become beautiful to us as our vision becomes more God-like.

Any careful study of 'Endymion' will show us that this is the thought which most deeply penetrates it from beginning to end, overlaid as it is sometimes with redundant fancy and imagery. We cannot forget that Keats was strongly under the influence of that which Wordsworth and Shelley were writing at this time; that the atmosphere in which he breathed

was alive with the renewed hopes of mankind ; that American Independence and the French Revolution were recent events in his childhood ; and that though his manhood was attained in a time of comparative peace, it was the peace of a changed world. All life, national and individual, had received a fresh impetus and was expanded. The reaction in literature, too, was a powerful influence with Keats. He sympathised with Wordsworth and learnt of him ; and the warrant for his advancement and progress lay in the fact that he was mature enough to know and recognise his own immaturity.

In a letter written to his friend Mr. Reynolds in 1818, Keats says: 'I compare human life  
'to a large mansion of many apartments, two  
'of which I can only describe, the doors of  
'the rest being as yet shut on me. The first  
'we step into we call the Infant, or Thought-  
'less Chamber, in which we remain as long as  
'we do not think. We remain there a long  
'while, and notwithstanding the doors of the  
'second chamber remain wide open, showing  
'a bright appearance. We care not to hasten to  
'it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by

' the awakening of the thinking principle within  
' us. We no sooner get into the second  
' chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of  
' Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated  
' with the light and the atmosphere. We see  
' nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of  
' delaying there for ever, in delight. However,  
' among the effects this breathing is father of,  
' is that tremendous one of sharpening one's  
' vision into the heart and nature of man, of  
' convincing one's nerves that the world is full  
' of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and  
' oppression ; whereby this Chamber of Maiden  
' Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at  
' the same time on all sides of it many doors  
' are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark  
' passages. We see not the balance of good  
' and evil ; we are in a mist ; *we* are now in that  
' state ; we feel "the burthen of the mystery."  
' To this point was Wordsworth come as far as  
' I can conceive when he wrote "Tintern Abbey,"  
' and it seems to me that his genius is explora-  
' tive of those dark passages. Now if we live  
' and go on thinking we too shall explore them.  
' He is a genius, and superior to us, in so far as



' he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed  
' a light in them.' And then, after comparing  
the genius of Wordsworth with that of Milton,  
he adds: 'He did not think with the human  
' heart as Wordsworth has done, yet Milton as  
' a philosopher had surely as great powers as  
' Wordsworth. What is then to be inferred?  
' Oh! many things. It proves there is really a  
' grand march of intellect, it proves that a  
' mighty providence subdues the mightiest minds  
' to the service of the time being, whether it be  
' in human knowledge or religion.'

This appreciation of Wordsworth in so  
young a man, and at the time that Wordsworth's  
thought was new to the world and only partially  
understood, is in itself a remarkable proof of the  
maturity of Keats. But his treatment of all  
subjects, though influenced by Wordsworth's  
truth and simplicity, was essentially different in  
many ways. It is enough to compare 'Dion' and  
' Laodamia' with any of the Greek subjects of  
Keats, and we shall see this at once. Wordsworth  
deliberately meant to be a teacher, Keats did  
not. Wordsworth pressed his philosophy and  
his moral purpose into public view wherever

it was possible, the philosophy of Keats was hidden under a luxuriant overgrowth of fancy. His desire was to be a dramatist—

to gather men and women,  
Live or dead, or fashioned by his fancy,  
Enter each and all, and use their service.  
Speak from every mouth—the speech, a poem<sup>1</sup>—

though at the time of his death he had very imperfectly developed the dramatic faculty.

But different as were their modes of reaching it, it was the same end which both Wordsworth and Keats pursued, the growth of the spirit to harmony by the reconciliation of its discordant elements.

‘If I should die,’ said Keats, in one of his letters to her whom he loved, ‘I have left no ‘immortal work behind me; nothing to make ‘my friends proud of my memory; *but I have ‘loved the principle of beauty in all things*, and ‘if I had had time I would have made myself ‘remembered.’ He had lived long enough to realise that the sense of beauty, which is the earliest to be awakened in every creative spirit, is incomplete until it so penetrates life, and

<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning. *One Word More.*

allies itself with the reality which does not at first appear to our perceptions beautiful, that they become one. And this realisation seems to be the hidden inspiration of 'Endymion.'

There are many indications in the poems which preceded 'Endymion' that Keats had consciously an underlying meaning in its sequence and incident, though its sudden changes and entanglement of images have many of the characteristics of a dream.

In one of the earliest poems, 'Lines written 'on looking over the Vale of Health, Hampstead,' we have the first notes of this longer work which was soon to follow.

Where had he been, from whose warm head outflow  
That sweetest of all songs, that ever new,  
That aye refreshing, pure deliciousness,  
Coming ever to bless  
The wanderer by moonlight? to him bringing  
Shapes from the invisible world, unearthly singing  
From out the middle air, from flowery nests,  
And from the pillowy silkiness that rests  
Full in the speculation of the stars.  
Ah! surely he had burst our mortal bars,  
Into some wondrous region he had gone  
To search for thee, divine Endymion!

He was a poet, sure a lover too,  
Who stood on Latmus' top, what time there blew

Soft breezes from the myrtle vale below,  
 And brought in faintness solemn, sweet and slow,  
 A hymn from Dian's temple ; while upswelling  
 The incense went to her own starry dwelling.  
 But though her face was clear as infant's eyes,  
 Though she stood smiling o'er the sacrifice,  
 The poet wept at her so piteous fate,  
 Wept that such beauty should be desolate.  
 So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,  
 And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion.

But the poem 'Sleep and Poetry' may be considered as the closest index we possess of Keats's scheme of life, and the principles on which he worked. The motto from 'the Flower and the Leaf,' at the head of it, is its key-note.

As I lay in my bed slepe full unmete  
 Was unto me, but why that I ne might  
 Rest, I ne wist, for there n'as erthly wight  
 (As I suppose) had more of hertis ese  
 Than I, for I n'ad sicknesse nor disese.

It is evident from the choice of these lines, as prologue to what follows, that Keats was puzzled by the contradictions in his own nature. He would fain sleep, his dreams were glorious and inspiring, and

why that I ne might  
 Rest, I ne wist ;

but the fact remained the same. The reign of

sleep and dreams was over for poetry, and the awakening spirit in him knew it. 'The refreshing, 'the pure deliciousness' of an old world time might linger, but it could no longer suffice. It is with a wistful tenderness and regret that he admits this truth.

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?  
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer  
That stays one moment in an open flower,  
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?  
What is more tranquil than a musk rose blowing  
In a green island, free from all men's knowing?  
More healthful than the leafiness of dales?  
More secret than a nest of nightingales?  
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?  
More full of visions than a high romance?  
What, but thee, Sleep? Soft closer of our eyes,  
Low murmurer of tender lullabies!  
Light hoverer around our happy pillows!  
Wreather of poppy buds and weeping willows!

But the regret is a passing one. The change he recognises as a sign of health and life, it is not lack of 'hertis ese,' nor any sign of sickness or decay, but the restlessness of advancement, of new birth, of a wider and diviner growth. Sleep is good and dreams are sweet, but in a world of suffering it is those only who wake and keep vigil who can be master spirits; and to tell the

mind that it may 'sleep on now, and take its 'rest,' is but the sorrowful cry of one who knows it to be impossible.

Therefore Keats with a brave joy, which had then had nothing to daunt it, rises to the higher life. He demands of sleep:—

But what is higher beyond thought than thee?  
Fresher than berries of a mountain-tree?  
More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal,  
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle?  
What is it? And to what shall I compare it?  
It has a glory, and nought else can share it.  
The thought thereof is awful, sweet, and holy,  
Chasing away all worldliness and folly:  
Coming sometimes like fearful claps of thunder,  
Or the low rumblings of earth's regions under;  
And sometimes like a gentle whispering  
Of all the secrets of some wondrous thing  
That breathes about us in the vacant air;  
So that we look around with prying stare,  
Perhaps to see shapes of light, ærial limning,  
And catch soft floatings from a faint-heard hymning,  
To see the laurel-wreath on high suspended,  
That is to crown our name when life is ended.  
Sometimes it gives a glory to the voice,  
And from the heart upsprings, rejoice! rejoice!  
Sounds which will reach the Framer of all things,  
And die away in ardent mutterings.

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,  
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean  
For his great Maker's presence, but must know  
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow.

From these lines it is clear that Keats felt poetry had entered on a new phase, and the next lines, the direct appeal to poetry itself, expand this thought, for the young poet in his humility feels that he is not yet a denizen of its glorious heaven, but he has felt the dawns of its life within him; the rapturous appreciation of beauty, the influence of all sweet sounds and sights, the intoxication of the clear air which poets find around them wherever they breathe, the gladness, and the glory, and 'the sanctuary 'splendour' unknown to the many,

And many a verse from so strange influence,  
That we must ever wonder how, and whence  
It came.

In the next lines we come upon what is probably, an inspiration from Wordsworth, for surely none other is so likely to have waked in the roving imagination of Keats the conception of finding the truest beauty in the life which lay immediately around him. It is one of those expressions which make us feel that we are not wrong in attributing to the young poet a maturity which may warrant us in looking for a deeper meaning in much that he says than lies upon the surface.

Also imaginings will hover  
Round my fireside, and haply there discover  
*Vistas of solemn beauty*, where I'd wander  
In happy silence, like the clear Meander,  
Through its lone vales ; and where I found a spot  
Of awfuller shade, or an enchanted grot,  
Or a green hill o'erspread with chequer'd dress  
Of flowers, and fearful from its loveliness :  
Write on my tablets all that was permitted,  
All that was for our human senses fitted.

And he knows that the individual life and home is  
but the school for wider flights and higher aims.  
The mind that has insight for the solemn beauty  
of the lives around it, 'the awful height of  
'human souls,' will be the best fitted to scale  
other heights of life, and to feel the infinite in all  
things. It is this which shall make the true poet,  
and be also the fulfilment of his prayer.

*Then* the events of this wide world I'd seize  
Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease,  
Till at its shoulders it should proudly see  
Wings to find out an immortality.

The poet's thought deepens. In the sweetness  
of the next lines there is merged the despairing  
pathos of the Royal Preacher with the  
unconscious sadness of a French philosopher.

Stop and consider, life is but a day,  
A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way



---

From a tree's summit ; a poor Indian's sleep  
 While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep  
 Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan ?  
 Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown,  
 The reading of an everchanging tale,  
 The light uplifting of a maiden's veil ;  
 A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air,  
 A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,  
 Riding the springy branches of an elm.

And for him who thus wrote the days were  
 even then so few. Not even the ten years he  
 craved for, that he might 'overwhelm himself in  
 'poesy,' were to be his lot. He had planned so  
 much, he accomplished so little. Shall we not  
 hold the more sacred and value the more  
 lovingly that which he did ? But when 'Sleep  
 'and Poetry' was written he could be prodigal of  
 hope. Life was a vista of endless possibilities  
 and purposes, and it is in the next lines that  
 we get the first indication of the leading thought  
 of 'Endymion.'

First the realms I'll pass  
 Of Flora, and old Pan : sleep in the grass,  
 Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,  
 And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees.  
 Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,  
 To woo sweet kisses from averted faces.

And can I ever bid these joys farewell ?

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,  
Where I may find the agonies, the strife  
Of human hearts ; for lo ! I see afar  
O'ersailing the blue cragginess, a car  
And steeds with streamy manes—the charioteer  
Looks out upon the winds with glorious fear :  
And now the numerous tramlings quiver lightly  
Along a huge cloud's ridge ; and now with sprightly  
Wheel downward come they into fresher skies,  
Tipt round with silver from the sun's bright eyes.  
Still downward with capacious whirl they glide ;  
And now I see them on a green hill-side  
In breezy rest among the nodding stalks.  
The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks  
To the trees and mountains ; and there soon appear  
Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear,  
Passing along before a dusky space  
Made by some mighty oaks : as they would chase  
Some ever-fleeting music, on they sweep.  
Lo ! how they murmur, laugh, and smile, and weep ;  
Some with upholden hand and mouth severe,  
Some with their faces muffled to the ear  
Between their arms : some clear in youthful bloom  
Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom ;  
Some looking back, and some with upward gaze.  
Yes, thousands in a thousand different ways  
Flit onward—now a lovely wreath of girls  
Dancing their sleek hair into tangled curls  
And now broad wings. Most awfully intent,  
The driver of those steeds is forward bent,  
And seems to listen. Oh, that I might know  
All that he writes with such a hurrying glow :

The visions all are fled—the car is fled  
Into the light of heaven, and in their stead

A sense of real things comes doubly strong,  
And, like a muddy stream, would bear along  
My soul to nothingness ; but I will strive  
Against all doubtings, and will keep alive  
The thought of that same chariot, and the strange  
Journey it went.

From such words as these it is plain how deeply the mind of Keats was penetrated with the sense of progress. Few lines that he has written show more completely how he realised himself as being only in 'the chamber of 'Maiden Thought,' and not yet acquainted with 'the burthen of the mystery,' though conscious of its existence. The vision of the chariot has an echo of Plato's chariot, but it is more than this: it is the vision of all the poetry that is yet to be ; that is, not necessarily of expressed thought, but of all the highest interpretations of the human mind, of the noblest hopes and deeds of which humanity is capable, rolling on with a melodious progress to the unknown future.

Most awfully intent,  
The driver of those steeds is forward bent,  
And seems to listen.

It is from feeling within himself this glorious power of vision and far-reaching hopefulness that Keats is brought to the questions of his own day.

Is there so small a range  
In the present strength of manhood, that the high  
Imagination cannot freely fly  
As she was wont of old? Prepare her steeds,  
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds  
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all,  
From the clear space of ether, to the small  
Breath of new buds enfolding? From the meaning  
Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening  
Of April meadows.

He remembers the days of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton, when the 'Muses  
'were nigh cloyed with honour' even in our own  
isle. Have these days passed for ever? Could  
all this be forgotten? He laments the foppery  
and barbarism in poetry which has crept in and  
defiled it; the men who

with a puling infant's force  
Have swayed about upon a rocking-horse,  
And thought it Pegasus. Ah, dismal-soul'd,  
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd  
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue  
Bared its ethereal bosom, and the dew  
Of summer nights collected still, to make  
The morning precious. Beauty was awake!  
Why were ye not awake?

He appeals passionately to the poets of long  
ago, saying that he cannot name them by these  
common folk and in 'this unholy place,' but he

would know if they delighted in our old lamenting Thames or our delicious Avon.

Or did ye stay to give a welcoming  
To some lone spirits who could proudly sing  
Their youth away and die ?

And with this connecting thought of Chatterton, whose memory he loved, he came back to the present day and the benediction of poetry poured out on our own time.

For sweet music has been heard  
In many places.

The Lake Poets are enshrined in the next lines.

Some has been upstirr'd  
From out its crystal dwelling in a lake  
By a swan's ebon bill : from a thick brake  
Nested and quiet in a valley mild  
Bubbles a pipe ; fine sounds are floating wild  
About the earth.

Some of the modern poets are reproached for the horror of the subjects they have chosen.

The poets' Polyphemes  
Disturbing the grand sea.

But Keats looked forward to a brighter day, when the music would be harmonised, the weeds of the past age would be cleared, and those who

came after would find a fresh sward overgrown  
with simple flowers.

And they shall be accounted poet-kings  
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.

And from the poetry of his contemporaries he  
comes diffidently, and with the humility which  
was such a strong characteristic of his greatness,  
to his own,

Will not some say that I presumptuously  
Have spoken? that from hastening disgrace  
'Twere better far to hide my foolish face?  
That whining boyhood should with reverence bow  
Ere the dread thunderbolt could reach me? How!  
If I do hide myself, it sure shall be  
In the very fane, the light of poesy.  
If I do fall, at least I will be laid  
Beneath the silence of a poplar shade,  
And over me the grass shall be smooth shaven,  
And there shall be a kind memorial graven.  
But off, despondence! miserable bane;  
They should not know thee who, athirst to gain  
A noble end, are thirsty every hour.  
What though I am not wealthy in the dower  
Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know  
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow  
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts  
Of man: though no great ministering reason sorts  
Out the dark mysteries of human souls  
To clear conceiving; yet there ever rolls

A vast idea before me, and I glean  
Therefrom my liberty ; thence too I've seen  
The end and aim of poesy.

An ocean dim, sprinkled with many an isle,  
Spreads awfully before me. How much toil !  
How many days ! what desperate turmoil !  
Ere I can have explored its widenesses.

He returns gently to thoughts of his friends,  
and descriptions of the pictures round his room,  
and rises 'refreshed and glad and gay.'

Such were the thoughts and hopes which  
were filling the poet's mind before he com-  
menced 'Endymion,' and they warrant us in  
looking for their fruition in this his longest work.  
It is a noteworthy fact that Shelley's prophetic  
poem, 'The Revolt of Islam,' was written at the  
same time. Captain Medwin says he was told  
by Shelley that this poem and 'Endymion' were  
written in friendly rivalry, and that the compact  
was to produce both works within six months. It  
seems possible that both poems may in some  
measure have been the result of ideas and hopes  
for humanity discussed together, though Keats  
writes subsequently, 'I refused to visit Shelley,  
'that I might have my own unfettered scope.'

But Keats was dissatisfied with his work when

it was done. Besides what he said of 'the slip-  
' shod "Endymion"' in the passage already  
quoted, we find him writing to his publisher,  
Mr. Taylor: 'In "Endymion" I have most likely  
' moved into the go-cart from the leading-strings.  
' In poetry I have a few axioms, and you will see  
' how far I am from their centre.

' 1st. I think poetry should surprise by a fine  
' excess, and not by singularity: it should strike  
' the reader as a wording of his own highest  
' thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

' 2nd. Its touches of beauty should never be  
' half-way, thereby making the reader breathless  
' instead of content. The rise, the progress, the  
' setting of imagery, should, like the sun, come  
' natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly,  
' although in magnificence, leaving him in the  
' luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think  
' what poetry should be, than to write it. And  
' this leads me to another axiom—that if poetry  
' comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it  
' had better not come at all. However it may be  
' with me, I cannot help looking into new coun-  
' tries with "Oh, for a muse of fire to ascend." If  
' "Endymion" serves me as a pioneer, perhaps I



'ought to be content, for, thank God, I can read  
'and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his  
'depths: and I have, I am sure, many friends,  
'who, if I fail, will attribute any change in my life  
'and temper to humbleness rather than pride—  
'to a cowering under the wings of great poets,  
'rather than to a bitterness that I am not ap-  
'preciated. *I am anxious to get "Endymion"*  
'*printed, that I may forget it, and proceed.* I  
'have copied the third book, and begun the  
'fourth.'

That this humility about his long poem was not deprecatory, but sincere, is shown by the preface to it, which is worth quoting, for its own intrinsic beauty of expression as well as for its characteristics of the writer.

### PREFACE.

Knowing within myself the manner in which this poem has been produced, it is not without a feeling of regret that I make it public.

What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The two st books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible

are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press ; nor should they if I thought a year's castigation would do them any good. It will not, the foundations are too sandy. It is just that this youngster should die away : a sad thought for me if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting and fitting myself for verses fit to live.

This may be speaking too presumptuously, and may deserve a punishment ; but no feeling man will be forward to inflict it : he will leave me alone with the conviction that there is not a fiercer hell than the failure in a great object. This is not written with the least atom of purpose to forestall criticisms of course, but from the desire I have to conciliate men who are competent to look and who do look with a jealous eye to the honour of English literature.

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy ; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted. Thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece and dulled its brightness, for I wish to try once more before I bid it farewell.

Teignmouth, April 10, 1818.

The characters, the circumstance, and the poetic dress of 'Endymion' are Greek, but they are English too. The scenery is English, and there is an unrest, a questioning, and a progression of thought throughout the poem, which is altogether foreign to Greek calm.

It may be noted, too, in passing, that 'Endymion' was written before the deepest part of the nature of Keats had been touched by the passion of love.

It is a more spiritual poem than he would have written a few years later, describing love as one who had not gained his knowledge from individual suffering but from a powerful imagination would be likely to describe it, and more interested in an ideal future than an absorbed present. The poem gains rather than loses from this fact. The spirit in a state of energy and activity, but free from self-concentration, would be winged for wider flight, and would see with clearer vision than when in its mortal pain it had

To question heaven, and hell, and heart in vain,  
though it might lack the wider sympathy of  
deepened and increased knowledge.

It was in April 1817 that Keats went to the Isle of Wight, and stayed by himself, writing with a child's glee of all he saw. 'The sea, Jack, 'the sea; the little waterfall; then the white 'cliff; then St. Catherine's Hill; the sheep in 'the meadows, the cows in the corn. . . . As 'for primroses, the island ought to be called 'Primrose Island, that is if the nation of cow-'slips agree thereto.' In a fortnight of this inspiration he produced the two first books of 'Endymion.'

So I will begin  
Now while I cannot hear the city's din,  
Now while the early budders are just new,  
And run in mazes of the youngest hue  
About old forests; while the willow trails  
Its delicate amber, and the dairy pails  
Bring home increase of milk.

The openings of the four books are all remarkable, and worth studying apart from the poem itself. The first consists of the well-known lines familiar to those whose knowledge of Keats often begins and ends with them.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever, &c.

The second is an invocation to the power of love.

O sovereign power of love! O grief! O balm!  
 All records, saving thine, come cool and calm  
 And shadowy, through the mist of passèd years, &c.

The third is an outpouring of scorn for those

who lord it o'er their fellow-men  
 With most prevailing tinsel ;

those

with not one tinge  
 Of sanctuary splendour,

who criticise the work they are unable to understand. And the fourth is an invocation of the Muse of Poetry in our native land, and contains the well-known lines :—

Great muse, thou know'st what prison  
 Of flesh and bone, curbs, and confines, and frets  
 Our spirit's wings, despondency besets  
 Our pillows ; and the fresh to-morrow morn  
 Seems to give forth its light in very scorn  
 Of our dull, uninspired, snail-pacèd lives.  
 Long have I said how happy he who thrives  
 To thee ! But then I thought on poets gone,  
 And could not pray—nor can I now—so on  
 I move to the end in lowliness of heart.

With the exception of these openings, the hymns to Pan and to Neptune, the picture of the sleep of Adonis, the roundelay which introduces Bacchus and his train, and the hymn of

Dian's festival, there are no digressions from the sequence and the regular development of the story, though the 'Edinburgh Review' asserted of it: 'The thin and scanty tissue of the story is 'merely the light framework on which his florid 'wreaths are suspended, and while his im- 'ginations go rambling and entangling them- 'selves everywhere, like wild honeysuckles, all 'idea of sober reason, plan, and consistency is 'utterly forgotten, and strangled in their waste 'fertility.' A more modern and appreciative critic<sup>1</sup> also says that in 'Endymion' 'there are 'no complete conceptions, no continuance of 'adequate words.' But it was 'a vast idea' which was before the poet's mind, and from which he 'gained his liberty;' and as we trace the windings of the story we feel the inner meaning of it gleaming before us, as the fair shrine ever gleamed before Endymion. This 'ghost of melodious prophesying' comes to us with power, even in the attractiveness of the narrative, and when we look beyond it, into the poet's hidden thought,—

<sup>1</sup> Walter Bagehot. *Literary Remains*, vol. i. p. 51.

that moment have we stept  
*Into a state of oneness*, and our state  
Is like a floating spirit's. But there are  
Richer entanglements, *enthralments far*  
*More self-destroying*, leading by degrees  
To the chief intensity.

For the prophesying is of the ideal beauty  
which shall comprise not only the beauty already  
realised, but even the seeming ugliness and loss,  
and which will have had fused into its glowing  
splendour all reality.

It is a ditty  
Not of these days, but long ago 'twas told  
By a cavern wind unto a forest old ;  
And then the forest told it in a dream  
To a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam  
A poet caught as he was journeying  
To Phœbus' shrine.

It is a story so old that it is of no special time  
or date, but is ever new, for it is of an eternal  
truth—the story of an ideal filled with vast  
possibilities and limitless desires. It is the  
'stretched metre of an antique song' reaching  
out to a great hope across ages of the world's  
restlessness and change.

## III.

*ENDYMION.*

## BOOK I.

THE story of 'Endymion' opens with the description of the mighty forest outspread on the sides of the mountain Latmos—a forest dank with weeds, hidden roots, o'erhanging boughs, 'palmy ferns,' rushes, and ivy-banks; through which winds pleasantly shadowed paths that lead out into the wide lawn where the marble altar stands, to which troops of little garlanded children are speeding in the early morning. Around the altar the children are joined by damsels bringing offerings, and shepherds,

Such as sat listening round Apollo's pipe,  
When the great deity, for earth too ripe,  
Let his divinity o'erflowing die  
In music, through the vales of Thessaly.

Close after these comes the venerable Priest of Pan, in his hand the basket of sacred herbs, and



on his head the beechen wreath. Then follow more shepherds, and the fair-wrought car which bore Endymion.

His youth was fully blown,  
Showing like Ganymede to manhood grown ;  
And, for those simple times, his garments were  
A chieftain king's : beneath his breast, half bare,  
Was hung a silver bugle, and between  
His nery knees there lay a boar-spear keen.  
A smile was on his countenance : he seemed,  
To common lookers-on, like one who dreamed  
Of idleness in groves Elysian ;  
But there were some who feelingly could scan  
A lurking trouble in his nether lip,  
And see that oftentimes the reins would slip  
Through his forgotten hands ; then would they sigh  
And think of yellow leaves, and owlets' cry,  
Of logs piled solemnly. Ah, well-a-day,  
Why should our young Endymion pine away ?

The circle of worshippers range themselves  
round the altar ; every look becomes reverent,  
every voice silent.

Endymion, too, without a forest-peer,  
Stood, wan and pale, and with an awed face,  
Among his brothers of the mountain chase.

The venerable priest reminds them of the  
joys and mercies the gods have showered on  
them, the sacred fire rises, the libation is poured  
forth, the chorus in Pan's worship is sung.

*Chorus to Pan.*

O thou, whose mighty palace roof doth hang  
From jagged trunks, and overshadoweth  
Eternal whispers, glooms, the birth, life, death  
Of unseen flowers in heavy peacefulness ;  
Who lovest to see the hamadryads dress  
Their ruffled locks where meeting hazels darken ;  
And through whole solemn hours dost sit, and hearken  
The dreary melody of bedded reeds  
In desolate places, where dank moisture breeds  
The pipy hemlock to strange overgrowth,  
Bethinking thee, how melancholy loth  
Thou wast to lose fair Syrinx—do thou now,  
By thy love's milky brow !  
By all the trembling mazes that she ran,  
Hear us, great Pan !

O thou, for whose soul-soothing quiet, turtles  
Passion their voices cooingly 'mong myrtles,  
What time thou wanderest at eventide  
Through sunny meadows, that outskirt the side  
Of thine enmossèd realms : O thou, to whom  
Broad-leaved fig-trees even now foredoom  
Their ripened fruitage ; yellow-girted bees  
Their golden honeycombs ; our village leas  
Their fairest blossomed beans, and poppièd corn ;  
The chuckling linnet its five young unborn,  
To sing for thee ; low creeping strawberries  
Their summer coolness ; pent-up butterflies  
Their freckled wings ; yea, the fresh-budding year  
All its completions—be quickly near,  
By every wind that nods the mountain-pine,  
O forester divine !

Thou to whom every fawn and satyr flies  
For willing service ; whether to surprise  
The squatted hare while in half-sleeping fit,  
Or upward ragged precipices flit  
To save poor lambkins from the eagle's maw ;  
Or by mysterious enticement draw  
Bewildered shepherds to their path again ;  
Or to tread breathless round the frothy main,  
And gather up all fancifullest shells  
For thee to tumble into Naiads' cells,  
And, being hidden, laugh at their outpeeping :  
Or to delight thee with fantastic leaping,  
The while they pelt each other on the crown  
With silvery oak-apples and fir-cones brown—  
By all the echoes that about thee ring,  
Hear us, O satyr king !

O hearkener to the loud-clapping shears,  
While ever and anon to his shorn peers  
A ram goes bleating : Winder of the horn,  
When snouted wild-boars routing tender corn  
Anger our huntsmen : Breather round our farms,  
To keep off mildews, and all weather harms :  
Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,  
That come a-swooning over hollow grounds,  
And wither drearily on barren moors :  
Dread opener of the mysterious doors  
Leading to universal knowledge—see,  
Great son of Dryope,  
The many that are come to pay their vows  
With leaves about their brows !

Be still the unimaginable lodge  
For solitary thinkings ; such as dodge

Conception to the very bourne of heaven,  
Then leave the naked brain ; be still the leaven  
That spreading on this dull and clodded earth,  
Gives it a touch ethereal—a new birth.  
Be still a symbol of immensity,  
A firmament reflected in a sea ;  
An element filling the space between ;  
An unknown—but no more ; we humbly screen  
With uplift hands our foreheads, lowly bending,  
And giving out a show most heaven-rending,  
Conjure thee to receive our humble pæan,  
Upon thy Mount Lycean !

The simple worship over, the nymphs dance,  
the shepherds pitch their quoits or rest in the  
grass, and Endymion lingers among the shep-  
herds ' gone in eld ' and with the aged priest.

There they discoursed upon the fragile bar  
That keeps us from our homes ethereal ;  
And what our duties there.

Their hopes and fears stray into Elysium,  
and they tell them one to another.

One felt heart-certain that he could not miss  
His quick-gone love, among fair blossom'd boughs,  
Where every zephyr-sigh pouts, and endows  
Her lips with music for the welcoming.  
Another wished, 'mid that eternal spring,  
To meet his rosy child, with feathery sails  
Sweeping, eye-earnestly, through almond vales :  
Who, suddenly, should stoop through the smooth wind,  
And with the balmiest leaves his temples bind :

And, ever after, through those regions be  
His messenger, his little Mercury.  
Some were athirst in soul to see again  
Their fellow-huntsmen o'er the wide champaign  
In times long past ; to sit with them, and talk  
Of all the chances in their earthly walk.

But Endymion dreams among them. His  
hopes are wider than any of theirs, but he cannot express them in their words, and he swoons into the trance which has so often held him of late. Then comes Peona, his sister, and guides him,

like some midnight spirit nurse  
Of happy changes in emphatic dreams,

to the island where his sleep may have its way, guarded by her—and he wakes refreshed and strengthened, ready to raise his voice once more upon the mountain heights, to cut his bow from the 'fair-grown yew-tree,' to

linger in a sloping mead  
To hear the speckled thrushes ;

to taste again the simple joys of life that had sufficed him until the enchantment had fallen upon him, which was his hope and yet his doom.

He implores for music. Peona's lay is sad

and 'subtle-cadenced.' Her lute seems to be under some spiritual influence of which she is unconscious : she flings it away, and demands the cause of her brother's sorrows, and he tells her of the vision which has possessed his life.

It was a land where 'sacred dittany and 'poppies red' seemed to cover the earth by magic, in which he had fallen asleep ; and there in the darkness, beneath the light of the stars, he had lain watching the zenith until the dome of heaven seemed to open to him. For one moment the moon appeared sailing among the clouds, then passed into a 'dark and vapoury 'tent.'

Again I looked, and, O ye deities,  
Who from Olympus watch our destinies !  
Whence that completed form of all completeness ?  
Whence came that high perfection of all sweetness ?  
Speak, stubborn earth, and tell me where, O where  
Hast thou a symbol of her golden hair ?  
Not oat-sheaves drooping in the western sun.

He goes on to describe passionately the joy of the moments spent with this beloved vision.

A moment more  
Our feet were soft in flowers. There was store  
Of newest joy upon that Alp. Sometimes  
A scent of violets, and blossoming limes,

Loiter'd around us ; then of honey cells,  
Made delicate from all white-flower bells ;  
And once, above the edges of our nest  
An arch face peep'd—an Oread as I guess'd.

But the vision seemed to slip from his embrace, he was conscious of his 'stupid sleep,' and when he woke the poppies hung 'dew-dabbled on their stalks,' the 'solitary breeze' was sad ; and as he wandered away the world was changed to him, the pleasant hues of earth and heaven had faded : 'deepest shades were 'deepest dungeons.' The rills were sooty, the fish were dying, the rose blew scarlet, and its thorns were like the spikes of aloe ; the very birds seemed 'disguised demons' luring him to darkness. But

Time, that aged nurse,  
Rocked him to patience.

He is now returning to the delights of nature, and feels that they help 'to stem the ebbing sea 'of weary life.' His sister answers him with tenderness, but rallies him—he must not lose his life for a dream's sake. She too dreams of heights, and has visions of impossible joys ; but she would never 'tease her pleasant days'

because she cannot 'mount into those regions.'  
Why should he sully

the entrusted gem  
Of high and noble life with thoughts so sick?

But while accepting her reproach, he feels  
that she does not understand him—she has not  
seen what he has seen—she has not known  
what he has known. Hitherto he has been  
content with the world's praises, he has longed  
for them. Nothing base could have wrecked him  
as he is wrecked, but his 'higher hope' is

Of too wide, too rainbow large a scope,  
To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks.

Whatever joy can be gathered by the senses,  
whatever realisation of itself the spirit can attain,  
leads to 'enthralments more self-destroying,' to  
the 'love and friendship' which 'crown the fore-  
'head of humanity.' What is fame to him in  
comparison with the ideal love for which he  
pines? There is no good in life but love.

what merest whim  
Seems all this poor endeavour after fame  
To one, who keeps within his steadfast aim  
A love immortal, an immortal too.

He goes on to plead that the vision is not a



merely passing one ; it has come again and again into his life since he first saw it. He has seen it mirrored in the well as he bent above it, he has heard its voice in the screen of overhanging weeds, it exists somewhere for him, but he will bear up against sorrow. Peona shall see 'what a 'calm round of hours shall make his days.'

## BOOK II.

After the introductory lines on the sovereign power of love, the second book opens with a picture of Endymion after many days of wandering resting beside a shady spring, and pavilioned in the bloom of a wild rose-tree. His feverish fingers pluck a bud and plunge its stalk into the cool water, its petals unfold, and a golden butterfly escapes. With clasped hands and renewed delight Endymion follows it.

From languor's sullen bands  
His limbs are loosed, and eager, on he hies,  
Dazzled to trace it in the sunny skies.  
It seemed he flew, the way so easy was ;  
And like a new-born spirit did he pass  
Through the green evening quiet in the sun  
O'er many a heath, through many a woodland dun,  
Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight dreams  
The summer time away.

He flies on in the beautiful chase until he reaches the side of a splashing fountain, into which the butterfly plunges and disappears, and Endymion throws himself down on the grass by the water in vain search, and there appears to him suddenly

A nymph uprisen to the breast  
In the fountain's pebbly margin, and she stood  
'Mong lilies, like the youngest of the brood.

She pours out words of sympathy, but knows that all joys which she could give him would avail nothing to his life's purpose.

But woe is me, I am but as a child  
To gladden thee ; and all I dare to say  
Is, that I pity thee ; that on this day  
I've been thy guide ; that thou must wander far  
In other regions, past the scanty bar  
To mortal steps before thou canst be ta'en  
From every wasting sigh, from every pain,  
Into the gentle bosom of thy love.  
Why it is thus, one knows in heaven above :  
But, a poor Naiad, I guess not. Farewell !  
I have a ditty for my hollow cell.

Hereat she vanished from Endymion's gaze,  
Who brooded o'er the water in amaze :  
The dashing fount poured on, and where its pool  
Lay, half-asleep, in grass and rushes cool,  
Quick waterflies and gnats were sporting still,  
And fish were dimpling, as if good nor ill  
Had fallen out that hour.

But it was a crisis in Endymion's life: he realises henceforth that his search must be one of suffering as well as of joy.

I can see

Nought earthly worth my compassing; so stand  
Upon a misty, jutting head of land—  
Alone? No, no; and by the Orphean lute,  
When mad Eurydice is listening to't,  
I'd rather stand upon this misty peak,  
With not a thing to sigh for, or to seek,  
But the soft shadow of my thrice-seen love,  
Than be—I care not what.

Then follows a passionate outpouring of his love to Cynthia, deepened and intensified by the revelation which the nymph of the fountain had made to him of the difficulties that lay before him.

I do think the bars

That kept my spirit in are burst—that I  
Am sailing with thee through the dizzy sky!  
How beautiful thou art! The world how deep!

Dear goddess, help! or the wide-gaping air  
Will gulf me—help! At this, with madden'd stare,  
And lifted hands and trembling lips, he stood,  
Like old Deucalion mountain'd o'er the flood,  
Or blind Orion hungry for the morn.

And in his despair he might have perished, but for a voice from the depths which bids him—

## Descend

Young mountaineer ! descend where alleys bend  
Into the sparry hollows of the world !  
    . . . He ne'er is crowned  
With immortality, who fears to follow  
Where airy voices lead : so through the hollow,  
The silent mysteries of earth, descend !  
He heard but the last words, nor could contend  
One moment in reflection : for he fled  
Into the fearful deep, to hide his head  
From the clear moon, the trees, and coming madness.  
'Twas far too strange, and wonderful for sadness :  
Sharpening, by degrees, his appetite  
To dive into the deepest. Dark, nor light,  
The region ; nor bright, nor sombre wholly,  
But mingled up, a gleaming melancholy,  
A dusky empire and its diadems,  
One faint eternal eventide of gems.

He wanders on from one surprise and change  
to another in this mysterious region, at the end of  
which through all his wanderings there gleams  
a fair shrine ; but at last, wearied out, he finds  
himself at the mouth of a wide outlet fathomless  
and dim. He craves in his solitude for the life  
he has left, the wild joys of Nature, which are  
now denied him, and he would 'o'erleap his  
'destiny' if he could, but his wish is vain. He  
is impelled onward, always onward, on his fair  
journey, where the sights grow more beautiful,

the sounds more enchanting. For music now  
breaks upon him.

It came more softly than the east could blow  
Arion's magic to the Atlantic isles.

Oh, did he ever live, that lonely man,  
Who loved—and music slew not ? 'Tis the pest  
Of love, that fairest joys give most unrest ;  
That things of delicate and tenderest worth  
Are swallow'd all, and made a sear'd dearth,  
By one consuming flame : it doth immerse  
And suffocate true blessings in a curse.  
Half happy, by comparison of bliss,  
Is miserable. 'Twas even so with this  
Dew-dropping melody, in the Carian's ear ;  
First heaven, then hell, and then forgotten clear,  
Vanished in elemental passion.

At last after a thousand mazes Endymion  
finds himself in a chamber, myrtle-walled, where  
Adonis watched by Cupids is sleeping. There  
is a deviation from the main thread of the poem  
here for the purpose of describing this picture.  
It is one of the imaginations which Lord Jeffrey  
complained of as 'rambling and entangling them-  
'selves everywhere, like wild honeysuckles.' But  
there is probably subtle art in the digression,  
for it comes with exquisite relief of beauty be-  
tween the under world of mystery through which  
Endymion has been wandering and the terror of

the world of suffering to which he is passing. It is artistic, full of graceful outline, colour, and light. We can see the classic form of Adonis sleeping until Venus shall waken him to his summer life of beauty, the lilies above him, the green tendrils enmeshing him everywhere, the rich colouring of, the convolvulus and velvet leaves, the

Serene Cupids watching silently.  
One, kneeling to a lyre, touch'd the strings,  
Muffling to death the pathos with his wings ;  
And, ever and anon, uprose to look  
At the youth's slumber ; while another took  
A willow bough, distilling odoriferous dew,  
And shook it on his hair ; another flew  
In through the woven roof, and fluttering-wise  
Rain'd violets upon his sleeping eyes.

One of the Cupids tells the Latmian the story of the sleep of Adonis, and of the expected approach of Venus to waken him. The elves are afoot : the stir of summer life is heard : Adonis moves.

Arise ! awake ! clear summer has forth walk'd  
Unto the clover-sward, and she has talk'd  
Full soothingly to every nested finch.

And Venus comes with her car and her doves,  
and there is universal joy, the God of Love himself  
standing by superb to share the general gladness.

Endymion alone is sad, and Venus, noticing it, prays of Love that he will give him his heart's desire, for she has watched him long and knows his secret.

Endymion ! one day thou wilt be blest :  
So still obey the guiding hand that fends  
Thee safely through these wonders for sweet ends.

And with these words of blessing the bright pageant vanishes, the car is lost to sight, the celestial hum is silent, and Endymion is alone once more. But hope is alive again, and he passes on through wild magnificence, along gleaming pathways, chasms and roaring streams, by caves and high fantastic roof, 'with overhead a vaulted 'dome like heaven's,' and everything huge and 'strange,' as the diamond balustrade which has guided him upward breaks off in mid air.

The solitary felt a hurried change  
Working within him into something dreary—  
Vex'd like a morning eagle, lost and weary,  
And purblind amid foggy midnight wolds.

A vision of Cybele crowned with turrets, with her chariot and attendant lions, passes before him in the dusk below, heightening the effect of dreariness, but to his rescue there comes an eagle, which he mounts, once more descending to dark-

ness and gloom as he thinks, yet finding himself of a sudden in a jasmine bower bestrewn with golden moss. Suffering has but sharpened his capability for joy, he gives himself up to the exquisite delight around him.

His every sense had grown  
Ethereal for pleasure ; 'bove his head  
Flew a delight half-graspable ; his tread  
Was Hesperian ; to his capable ears  
Silence was music from the golden spheres ;  
A dewy luxury was in his eyes ;  
The little flowers felt his pleasant sighs,  
And stirred them faintly.

In this enchanted land his own passion embodies itself once more in a dream of his immortal love. He believes that she has become real to him at last, he speaks to her, and clasps her in his arms, and is answered by her. But again he wakes to loneliness the deeper for his dream of joy. His sadness is no longer loud and violent, his love is now too deep for that, it is quieted with its own intensity.

Love's madness he had known :  
Often with more than tortured lion's groan  
Moanings had burst from him ; but now that rage  
Had passed away : no longer did he wage  
A rough-voiced war against the dooming stars.  
No, he had felt too much for such harsh jars.



He is in the depths of the earth and dreams over his past life. Step by step he retraces his old dreams of usefulness, his shepherd's throne, his first vision of his love, the great Pan festival, his sister's sorrow. He recalls all his own sad story, and compares himself as he is with that which he has been. The vision has changed all.

Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core  
All other depths are shallow.

But he turns from his own sorrows to listen to those of Arethusa and Alpheus, who have also failed to understand the complex ways of Dian, and his prayer to the gentle goddess of his pilgrimage is no longer for himself but for them.

Soothe and assuage,  
If thou art powerful, these lovers pains,  
And make them happy in some happy plains.

And suddenly he himself has reached the greatest depth he has yet sounded.

The visions of the earth were gone and fled :  
He saw the giant sea above his head.

## BOOK III.

And Endymion, having reached the deep water-world, is surprised by the light which shines around him there. It is Cynthia who has found him, but he does not know her. He recognises only a sense of blessedness from her presence : he rests, and then rises in silence to 'fare along his fated' way at the bottom of the sea.

Far had he roam'd  
With nothing save the hollow vast, that foam'd  
Above, around, and at his feet ; save things  
More dread than Morpheus' imaginings :  
Old rusted anchors, helmets, breastplates large  
Of gone sea-warriors ; brazen beaks and targe ;  
Rudders that for a hundred years had lost  
The sway of human hand ; gold vase emboss'd  
With long-forgotten story.

In his wanderings he pours forth his soul to the moon. She is bound up with every thought of his childhood, with all his love of nature, with everything that he holds most sacred. But he fears to confess to her how his new love has absorbed his heart ; and large as his mental vision has become through suffering, it has failed to

recognise the unity of the old love and  
Then suddenly lifting his eyes, he sees  
'concave green of the sea'

An old man sitting calm and peacefully.  
Upon a weeded rock this old man sat,  
And his white hair was awful, and a mat  
Of weeds were cold beneath his cold thin  
And, ample as the largest winding sheet,  
A cloak of blue wrapp'd up his aged bones  
O'erwrought with symbols by the deepest  
Of ambitious magic: every ocean form  
Was woven in with black distinctness; still  
And calm, and whispering, and hideous rocks  
Were emblem'd in the woof; with every sea  
That skims, or dives, or sleeps, 'twixt cape

Beside this old man lay a pearly wand,  
And in his lap a book, the which he conn'd  
So steadfastly, that the new denizen  
Had time to keep him in amazèd ken,  
To mark these shadowings, and stand in awe  
The old man raised his hoary head, and saw  
The 'wildered stranger.

And in a voice of solemn joy, that awed  
Echo into oblivion, he said:  
'Thou art the man! Now shall I lay my  
In peace upon my watery pillow: now  
Sleep will come smoothly to my weary brow  
O Jove! I shall be young again, be your  
O shell-borne Neptune, I am pierced and  
With new-born life! What shall I do? When  
When I have cast this serpent-skin of woe

Endymion is terrified, dreading some deadly fate. But a short time ago so happy in his love, and now to perish? No! he cries to his love, he feels her influence, he gains courage and advances to the mysterious old man, and as he does so his heart yearns over him.

Lo ! his heart 'gan warm  
With pity, for the grey-hair'd creature wept.  
Had he then wrong'd a heart where sorrow kept?

It is Glaucus who pours out his sad story, telling him how he had loved the maid Scylla, but had been lured from his devotion by Circe, whom he surprised at her orgies, and who in her wrath laid upon him the fate of premature age ; yet

not to go the way of aged men,  
But live and wither, cripple and still breathe  
Ten hundred years beneath the sea.

Her curse soon began to be accomplished.  
As Glaucus breasted the water,

Upon a dead thing's face his hand was laid :  
He look'd—'twas Scylla ! Cursed, cursed Circe !

He has carried his dead love in his arms to a crystalline temple and has laid her there, and he has piously laid all lovers who have perished in

the sea beside her. For after years of misery, in the 'gulfing' of a general wreck an old man's dead hand held out a scroll on which his own doom was described, and he also read the secret which might break the spell.

A youth by heavenly power loved and led  
Shall stand before him, whom he shall direct  
How to consummate all.

Endymion is the promised deliverer. By the magic which Glaucus has studied, by the power in Endymion from his love, the spell may be broken now. Eagerly Glaucus leads the stranger to the shining temple, where,

In that crystal place, in silent rows,  
Poor lovers lay at rest from joys and woes.  
The stranger from the mountains, breathless, traced  
Such thousands of shut eyes in order placed;  
Such ranges of white feet, and patient lips  
All ruddy,—for here death no blossom nips.  
He marked their brows and foreheads; saw their hair  
Put sleekly on one side with nicest care;  
And each one's gentle wrists, with reverence,  
Put cross-wise to its heart.

Glaucus and Endymion proceed together to work a spell upon them, and restore them to life and love.

Death fell a-weeping in his charnel house.

There arose  
A noise of harmony, pulses and throcs  
Of gladness in the air—while many, who  
Had died in mutual arms devout and true,  
Sprang to each other madly ; and the rest  
Felt a high certainty of being blest.

And so these blue halls of Neptune, over which

The waters drew  
Their doming curtains, high, magnificent,

are filled with joy ; and troops of happy spirits  
led by Glaucus and Scylla pass through them,  
while Endymion goes on his high employ, show-  
ering those powerful fragments on the dead, and  
rejoicing in their gladness. The joyous train  
passes on into the halls of Neptune.

They stood in dreams  
Till Triton blew his horn. The palace rang ;  
The Nereids danced ; the Syrens faintly sang ;  
And the great Sea-king bowed his dripping head.  
Then Love took wing, and from his pinions shed  
On all the multitude a nectarous dew.

And Venus with kind words blesses Endy-  
mion again, as she sees him among the throng of  
those he has freed.

What, not yet  
Escaped from dull mortality's harsh net ?  
A little patience, youth, 'twill not be long.

The merriment goes on, and in a sudden lull a

grand hymn to Neptune is sung, and then in the dim melodious beauty of all that surrounds him Endymion falls again into trance-like sleep, and to his inward senses there gleam bright words,

Written in starlight on the dark above,

and giving him assurance that for her he loves he has won immortal bliss, by his deed in the water-depths, and that the time is not far off when she will snatch him 'into endless heaven.' When he wakes he is in a cool green forest beside a placid lake.

#### BOOK IV.

And in this cool green forest Endymion finds fresh love awaiting him. A sorrowful song breaks upon his ear. It is a princess from beyond the Ganges who is pouring out her soul in loneliness and despair. Endymion's sympathy for all grief has been waked in the water-world, and his love soon follows it. His ideal seems distant from him ; he is wholly given up to the present. The princess sings a roundelay to sorrow, which is a subtle blending of grave and gay, and weaves into the midst of it the picture

of Bacchus and Ariadne, which completes the  
captivation of Endymion.

Endymion could not speak, but gazed on her,  
And listen'd to the wind that now did stir  
About the crisped oaks full drearily,  
Yet with as sweet a softness as might be  
Remember'd from its velvet summer song.

And when at last he breaks silence it is to  
implore her love, having renounced every hope  
and aspiration of his life but that.

Fair Melody ! kind Syren ! I've no choice ;  
I must be thy sad servant evermore :  
I cannot choose but kneel here and adore.  
Alas, I must not think—by Phœbe, no !  
Let me not think, soft Angel !

His dream of bliss is shaken by hearing  
echoed dismally throughout the forest,

Woe !

Woe ! woe to that Endymion ! where is he ?

But in another moment Mercury has sent his  
black steeds with large dark-blue wings to them,  
and Endymion and his new love mount among  
cool clouds and winds.

Slowly they sail, slowly as icy isle  
Upon a calm sea drifting.

And even here Endymion dreams of his ideal



love once more. He seems to be with her in heaven ; he dreams of 'young Phœbe golden-haired,' even by the side of his Indian love, and urges their steeds forward into 'the dusk heavens 'silvery,' perplexed and bewildered by the passions which he cannot reconcile. The moon-light falls upon him.

Full facing their swift flight, from ebon streak,  
The moon put forth a little diamond peak,  
No bigger than an unobserv'd star,  
Or tiny point of fairy scimeter ;  
Bright signal that she only stoop'd to tie  
Her silver sandals, ere deliciously  
She bow'd into the heavens her timid head.  
Slowly she rose, as though she would have fled,  
While to his lady meek the Carian turn'd,  
To mark if her dark eyes had yet discerned  
This beauty in its birth. Despair ! despair !  
He saw her body fading gaunt and spare  
In the cold moonshine. Straight he seized her wrist :  
It melted from his grasp ; her hand he kiss'd,  
And, horror ! kiss'd his own—he was alone.  
Her steed a little higher soared, and then  
Dropt hawk-wise to the earth.

Endymion enters a den of despair, and there falls into that lethargy which constantly overtakes those who have suffered a great loss and have not yet received any mental impetus from their changed circumstances. His eyes are

shut. He does not see 'the skye mask, the  
'pinioned multitude so silvery in its passing'  
whom he hears chanting of Cynthia's wedding  
—but there is a great calm in his soul, and he  
touches earth again.

Down his steed him bore,  
Prone to the green head of a misty hill.  
His first touch of the earth went nigh to kill.

Here he recollects himself.

To him  
Who lives beyond earth's boundary, grief is dim,  
Sorrow is but a shadow :

But he must steadfastly face his sorrow and  
see what it holds for him, and there in the  
quietude he finds his lost love again. Surely he  
will keep her now, he had but lost her for an ideal,  
for something shadowy and intangible which can  
never satisfy him.

I have clung  
To nothing, loved a nothing, nothing seen  
Or felt but a great dream.

There never lived a mortal man, who bent  
His appetite beyond his natural sphere,  
But starved and died. My sweetest Indian, here,  
Here will I kneel, for thou redeemed hast  
My life from too thin breathing : gone and past  
Are cloudy phantasms. Caverns lone, farewell !  
And air of visions, and the monstrous swell

Of visionary seas! No, never more  
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore  
Of tangled wonder, breathless, and aghast.  
Adieu, my daintiest Dream! although so vast,  
My love is still for thee. The hour may come  
When we shall meet in pure Elysium.

He goes on to picture the earthly delights he will gather together for his love, the honey from the gnarled hive, the apples wan with sweetness, the pipes fashioned of the Syrinx flag, the streams turned from their courses to flow through their dwelling, the honeysuckles trained beside them.

Say is not bliss within our perfect seizure?  
O that I could not doubt!

But they were fancies 'vain and crude.' He knew their futility even as he uttered them; life had grown too real for such satisfaction, and his princess answers him—

Ah! bitter strife.  
I may not be thy love, I am forbidden.

He could answer her nothing. He knew in his heart too well that her words were true, that if he accepted life for himself such as he described it, it would be but living death.

The Carian  
No word returned: both lovelorn, silent, wan,

Into the valleys green together went.  
Far wandering, they were perforce content  
To sit beneath a fair lone beechen tree :  
Nor at each other gazed, but heavily  
Pored on its hazel cirque of shedded leaves.

He did not stir  
His eyes from the dead leaves, or one small pulse  
Of joy he might have felt. The spirit culls  
Unfaded amaranth, when wild it strays  
Through the old garden-ground of boyish days.  
A little onward ran the very stream  
By which he took his first soft poppy dream,  
And on the very bark 'gainst which he leant  
A crescent he had carved, and round it spent  
His skill in little stars. The teeming tree  
Had swell'n and green'd the pious character,  
But not ta'en out. Why, there was not a slope  
Up which he had not fear'd the antelope ;  
And not a tree, beneath whose rooty shade  
He had not with his tamed leopards play'd ;  
Nor could an arrow light, or javelin,  
Fly in the air where his had never been—  
And yet he knew it not.

And then Peona appears once more, rallying  
him on his sadness, rejoicing in his return,  
relating the preparations for the hymning to  
Cynthia which is about to take place. She  
tells Endymion how he has been believed dead.

Many upon thy death have ditties made.

'But he will be received with universal joy, if

he will but banish the sadness from his brow and forget his sorrows.

He could bear no more, and so  
Bent his soul fiercely like a spiritual bow,  
And twang'd it inwardly, and calmly said ;  
'I would have thee my only friend, sweet maid !  
My only visitor ! not ignorant though,  
That those deceptions which for pleasure go  
'Mong men, are pleasures real as real may be ;  
But there are higher ones I may not see,  
If impiously an earthly realm I take.  
Since I saw thee, I have been wide awake  
Night after night, and day by day, until.  
Of the empyrean I have drunk my fill.  
Let it content thee, sister, seeing me  
More happy than betides mortality.'

Henceforth he will devote himself to ruling  
his shepherd-realm from some retreat where  
Peona alone should visit him. He does not see  
the gladness which is dawning in the face of his  
love, he does not hear her whispered joy in him.  
A mystic dreaminess falls on all three,

the spirit-blow  
Was struck, and all were dreamers.

Endymion tries to say his farewell, but his  
courage fails him, he implores them to meet him  
once more for a final parting. In the silent  
groves behind Dian's temple he will see them

once more in the evening. Through the long  
hours of the day he dreams, only lifting

His eyes abroad, to see how shadows shifted  
With the slow move of time.

Then when the shadows of the poplar-tops  
have reached the river's brim, he rises and walks  
towards the grove, lamenting.

'Why such a golden eve? The breeze is sent  
Careful and soft, that not a leaf may fall  
Before the serene father of them all  
Bows down his summer-head below the west.  
Now am I of breath, speech, and speed possest,  
But at the setting I must bid adieu  
To her for the last time. Night will strew  
On the damp grass myriads of lingering leaves,  
And with them I shall die; nor much it grieves  
To die, when summer dies on the cold sward.  
Why, I have been a butterfly, a lord  
Of flowers, garlands, love-knots, silly posies,  
Groves, meadows, melodies, and arbour-roses;  
My kingdom's at its death, and just it is  
That I should die with it: so in all this  
We miscall grief, bale, sorrow, heart-break, woe,  
What is there to 'plain of? By Titan's foe  
I am but rightly served.' So saying, he  
Tripp'd lightly on, in sort of deathful glee,  
Laughing at the clear stream and setting sun  
As though they jests had been.

But his mood deepens as he enters the  
wood.

‘I did wed  
Myself to things of light from infancy ;  
And thus to be cast out, thus lorn to die,  
Is sure enough to make a mortal man  
Grow impious.’ So he inwardly began  
On things for which no wording can be found,  
Deeper and deeper sinking, until drown’d  
Beyond the reach of music.

He does not hear the choir of Cynthia that  
is chanting the vesper hymn close to him, he  
does not see the smiles of the two maidens,

Wan as primroses gathered at midnight  
By chilly-fingered spring. . . .  
‘Endymion,’ said Peona, ‘we are here !  
What wouldst thou ere we all are laid on bier?’  
Then he embraced her, and his lady’s hand  
Pressed, saying, ‘Sister, I would have command,  
If it were heaven’s will, on our sad fate.’  
At which that dark-eyed stranger stood elate  
And said, in a new voice, but sweet as love,  
To Endymion’s amaze, ‘By Cupid’s dove,  
And so thou shalt ! and by the lily truth  
Of my own breast thou shalt, beloved youth !’  
And as she spake, into her face there came  
Light, as reflected from a silver flame :  
Her long black hair swell’d ampler, in display  
Full golden ; in her eyes a brighter day  
Dawn’d blue, and full of love.

It was her that he had sought for so long,  
his first fair love, the vision of his life, and she  
adds :—

---

'Twas fit that from this mortal state  
Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd-for change  
Be spiritualised.

Then he knelt down before her in a blissful  
swoon, and she gave her hands to him.

They vanished far away : Peona went  
Home through the gloomy wood in wonderment.



## IV.

HAVING seen that 'Endymion' is a consecutive whole with a distinct development, and very few digressions from its regular sequence, the next question we ask is, whether there is any underlying meaning in it? The story, exquisite as it is, is not of sufficient strength to stand on its merits as a story alone, and its very entanglements point to the supposition that its leading thoughts do not lie on the surface, and must be looked for deeper.

Many passages in the poem would lead us to believe that Keats was consciously expressing a vast idea in it, but genius is not of necessity conscious of what its inspirations convey to other minds, its varied capabilities of interpretation are one of the most distinctive signs of its prophetic power.

Perhaps the first interpretation and the most obvious which occurs to us is that Endymion

himself is the Imagination in all time searching for the spirit of Beauty ; that Cynthia, the enlightened side of the moon, represents the beauty of a bygone age, when the world was young ; and the dark side, the Indian Princess, shows the newer phases on which Imagination has entered ; Imagination at last discovering the eternal Unity of all Beauty, and becoming one with it for ever. This theory would be quite borne out by the poem, but there are parts of it which seem to point to a larger meaning still, a meaning of more widely human interest and therefore more abiding, and among the many interpretations which will be given to every work of genius, it may be worth suggesting this one. Let us take 'Endymion' as a story of the Spirit of Man, the spirit which sleeps till wakened by higher spiritual power. Peona may represent the physical, or first developed side of man's nature, mechanically nursing and watching over the slumbering spirit, and aware that it possesses qualities beyond its own.

Brother, 'tis vain to hide  
That thou dost know of things mysterious,  
Immortal, starry ; such alone could thus

---

Weigh down thy nature. Hast thou sinned in aught  
Offensive to the heavenly powers?

Endymion, touched with a higher knowledge, stands among his forest peers as one in a dream. He listens to their hopes and their beliefs, but they could not understand his if he expressed them. The spirit that has touched him is Love, but it is Love in the 'completed form of all completeness.' It is Love in its perfection. It is a vision which once seen makes it impossible that the spirit of man should ever be at rest again apart from its ideal. When it vanished the wind seemed to bring

Faint fare-thee-wells and sigh-shrilled adieus,

as if its manifestation was far away from the unrest of the present. But Endymion must henceforth search for ever, the happy forest days are over. The spirit's life once stirred may sleep, indeed, but never unconsciously; it dreams, and its dreams are of its own existence. However much it tries to content itself with its former joys, it must for ever fail, for the fair shrine gleams before it, and the past holds nothing of the power which is drawing it on.

Its higher hope  
 Is of too wide, too rainbow-large a scope,  
 To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks.  
 Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine.  
 A fellowship with essence : till we shine  
 Full alchemized and free of space. Behold  
 The clear religion of heaven.

Can we be wrong in believing that, consciously or unconsciously, the thought which was in Keats's mind was of that refining fire through which the soul of man must pass?—that the purification from self, the beatitude of complete self-abnegation, is the hope which

Is of too wide, too rainbow-large a scope,  
 To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that these lines, which seem to have concentrated in themselves so much of the leading thought of 'Endymion,' were an amendment on the original—as if Keats would himself have made this part of the poem emphatic. In a letter dated January 30, 1818, he writes:—

'My dear Taylor,—These lines, as they now stand, about "happiness," have rung in my ears like "a chime a mending." See here :

" Behold

Wherein lies happiness, Peona ? fold," &c.

It appears to me the very contrary of "blessed." I hope this will appear to you more eligible :

"Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine

From henceforth the true life of the spirit is hidden, but it is a waking reality, it is more than the sleep that is ended.

My restless spirit never could endure  
To brood so long upon one luxury,  
Unless it did, though fearfully, espy  
A hope beyond the shadow of a dream !

It is a life of action, though of sadness—of undying hope, though steeped in suffering. The wakened spirit can neither 'love its life nor hate.'

I'll smile no more, Peona ; nor will wed  
Sorrow, the way to death ; but patiently  
Bear up against it : so farewell, sad sigh ;  
And come instead demurest meditation,  
To occupy me wholly, and to fashion

---

A fellowship with essence, till we shine  
Full alchemized and free of space. Behold  
The clear religion of heaven—Peona ! fold," &c.

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You must indulge me by putting this in ; for, setting aside the badness of the other, such a preface is necessary to the subject. The whole thing must, I think, have appeared to you, who are a consecutive man, as a thing almost of mere words. But I assure you that, when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the imagination towards a truth. My having written that argument will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of anything I ever did. It set before me the gradations of happiness even like a kind of pleasure-thermometer, and is my first step towards the chief attempt in the drama—the playing of different natures with joy and sorrow.

'Do me this favour, and believe me,

'Your sincere friend,

'J. KEATS.'

My pilgrimage for the world's dusky brink.  
No more will I count over, link by link,  
My chain of grief : no longer strive to find  
A half-forgetfulness in mountain wind,  
Blustering about my ears ; ay, thou shalt see,  
Dearest of sisters, what my life shall be :  
What a calm round of hours shall make my days.  
There is a paly flame of hope that plays  
Where'er I look.

But Endymion does not expect to be understood. He knows that the revelation he has had has made him alone for ever, as far as all former companionship is concerned, and he accepts his fate.

At first he is lured by the golden butterfly of pleasure, which changes, even when he seems to have tracked it home, into the nymph who says

I am but as a child  
To gladden thee, and all I dare to say  
Is that I pity thee. . . .

Thou must wander far  
In other regions, past the scanty bar  
To mortal steps, before thou canst be ta'en  
From every wasting sigh, from every pain,  
Into the gentle bosom of thy love.  
Why it is thus one knows in heaven above.

Thus the light and early hours of the spirit's search begin with pleasure which promises

greatly, and seems even in its passing to be sorry for the soul it leaves ; and then life deepens, and the spirit passes from the cool mossy well and rose-trees to the city, with its feverish life, its restless hearts, its unresting days and nights.

The war, the deeds,  
The disappointments, the anxiety,  
Imagination's struggle, far and nigh  
All human, bearing in themselves this good  
That they are still the air, the subtle food  
To make us feel existence, and to show  
How quiet death is.

And the spirit, in the suffering of this new birth, wearies.

I can see  
Naught earthly worth my compassing, so stand  
Upon a misty jutting head of land  
Alone.

For what desolation is greater than that which is felt when for the first time the agony of the world is borne in upon the soul? It stands alone in a mist upon a promontory, the waves of that sorrow of which it has become conscious breaking forlornly around it, its individual aims and hopes seeming for the time worthless.

Then hope revives with faith in the vision

which shall yet harmonise the discords of this sorrow, and moments of wild and rapturous joy succeed to grief in thinking of the glimpse of beauty which has waked it to consciousness.

As each stage of life develops its power and rouses more fully the spiritual nature, the longing for the eternal beauty becomes more intense.

I'd rather stand upon this misty peak,  
With not a thing to sigh for or to seek,  
But the soft shadow of my thrice-seen love,  
Than be I know not what.

I do think the bars  
That kept my spirit in are burst—that I  
Am sailing with thee through the dizzy sky !  
How beautiful thou art ! The world how deep !

But it is even at the moments when it has attained greatest altitude that the spirit is compelled to descend to the lowest depths, to look for the beauty which is hidden there. It was his highest dream which was interrupted by the voice which bade Endymion

descend where alleys bend  
Into the sparry hollows of the world.



He ne'er is crowned  
With immortality who fears to follow  
Where airy voices lead ; so through the hollow,  
*The silent mysteries of earth descend.*

Before all true ascending of the spirit there is descending too : there is a land of silent mystery which the soul must encounter alone, there are sorrows it must know, there are sufferings it must endure and see, before it can find that oneness of all beauty which is its eternal prize.

'Twas far too strange and wonderful for sadness,  
Dark nor light  
The region : nor bright nor sombre wholly,  
But mingled up, a gleaming melancholy,  
A dusky empire, and its diadems,  
One faint eternal eventide of gems.

It is by an irresistible impulse that the spirit is now led. Through winding passages, through giant ranges of sapphire columns, over bridges athwart a crystal flood, over jagged rocks and jutting ledges that overhang the deep abyss, on ridges so narrow that there seems to be no foothold, it makes its way, until, wearied, it rests at last before

A wide outlet, fathomless and dim,  
To wild uncertainty and shadows grim.

And all this time it is alone, and its solitude magnifies the shadows.

*And thoughts of self came on, how crude and sore  
The journey homeward to habitual self!*

What misery most drowningly doth sing,  
In lone Endymion's ear, now he has caught  
The goal of consciousness? Ah! 'tis the thought,  
The deadly feel of solitude: for lo,  
He cannot see the heavens, nor the flow  
Of rivers, nor hill flowers running wild  
In pink and purple chequer, nor, up-piled,  
The cloudy rack slow journeying in the west,  
Like herded elephants: nor felt nor prest  
Cool grass, nor tasted the fresh slumbrous air,  
But far from such companionship to wear  
An unknown time surcharged with grief away,  
Was now his lot.

This self-absorbment is destruction, the spirit must go deeper still, it must not rest, it cannot rest in *itself*, in its own sorrow or even its own terror. There is no help for it and no hope for it while it remains alone.

Passing gulf and dell

And torrents, and ten thousand jutting shapes  
Half seen through deepest gloom and grisly gapes  
Blackening on every side, and overhead  
A vaulted dome like heaven's far bespread  
With starlike gems: ay, all so huge and strange,  
The solitary felt a hurried change  
Working within him into something dreary,  
Vex'd like a morning eagle lost and weary

And purblind amid foggy midnight wolds.  
But he revives at once : *for who beholds*  
*New sudden things, nor casts his mental slough ?*

Wherefore delay,  
Young traveller, in such a mournful place ?  
Art thou wayworn, or canst not further trace  
The diamond path ? And does it indeed end  
Abrupt in middle air ?

Not seldom is the spirit tempted to think that  
it has reached the utmost limit possible, that  
there is neither light nor hope beyond, its path  
breaks off—

he was indeed wayworn,  
Abrupt in middle air, his way was lost.

But here in the depths of its lonely sorrow  
the spirit is given another vision of the beauty  
which is to be, of the love which is the eternal  
truth though interpreted through the medium  
of its own passion. It was in his eagle descent  
through unknown things that Endymion found  
his jasmine bower, and saw once more the ideal  
whom he loved. Not yet can she raise him 'to  
'starry eminence,' but she will 'tell him stories  
'of the sky,' and his words, when she again  
vanishes from him, are the cry of every soul  
that has been touched with the larger love and  
eternal beauty.

---

Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core  
All other depths are shallow : essences  
Once spiritual are like muddy lees,  
Meant but to fertilise my earthly root,  
And make my branches lift a golden fruit  
Into the bloom of heaven. Other light  
. . . is dark.

It is now for the first time that Endymion emerges from himself and is touched with a sense of the sorrows of others. The sadness of Arethusa wakes pity in him, and breathing a prayer for her, he finds himself in the lowest depth of all, at the bottom of the sea of this world's sorrow. And it is here in the lowest depth, having sounded grief with its own plummet line, that the spirit begins to gain its truest life. It is moved with pity, and it labours to bring its own glad vision of love to hearts and lips that are cold and have grown weary of waiting. No sorrow is foreign to it, the suffering of others is its own, it believes in eternal love even here. Was there not a bright ray from Cynthia shining in 'that deep deep water 'world'? Was not the presence of him who believed in her as new life to those who had been living in darkness?

But first a little patience, first undo  
This tangled thread and wind it to a clue.  
Ah, gentle ! 'tis as weak as spiders' skein ;  
And shouldst thou break it—What, is it done so clean ?  
A power overshadows thee ! oh brave !  
The spite of hell is tumbling to its grave.

It was the might of the power of a strong belief—faith in eternal love—by which Endymion touched those cold dead hearts which seemed as if even love could not move them, and the fast-closed eyes that were shut to the beauty which Cynthia revealed to him.

And the spirit of man, when it goes into the depths of trouble and suffering, must go strong in this strong belief. It must lay the spell of its trust in eternal love and eternal beauty on the cold dead hearts and shut eyes of its brothers and sisters whom it finds there, and then shall be heard the noise of harmony, and those shall spring to each other whose love has not been dead but sleeping. For man too there shall be a writing in the starlight, for his heaven will be nearer and his completeness closer to its completed form.

And now the poem passes into a phase of mysterious vagueness. It necessarily must do

so. The poet himself has come 'to the burthen  
'of the mystery ;' he can speak but vaguely of  
what he has found there. The spirit is led  
from the depths to the light of ordinary day  
with a new inspiration.

Through the dark earth and through the wondrous sea  
it passes to 'a new woe.'

The sad princess is represented as self-absorbed and full of sorrow. In loving her, Endymion loses sight of his ideal, and contents himself with a limited apprehension of real Beauty. For the time he becomes blind to all else. The mind that is wholly occupied with one side of an object, must necessarily become untrue to its eager aspirations, and a great unrest and bewildering fills the soul. The poet represents Endymion in the fourth book as entering upon this phase of temptation. The world is darker, sadder than of old: sorrow is everywhere. Pan is dead, and the golden age is past. One fleeting dream of it comes back in the pageant of Bacchus and his crew, and streams with sunset light across the

present, then fades, leaving only the night to come, and the soul despairs.

I have clung  
To nothing, loved a nothing, nothing seen  
Or felt but a great dream.

And such despair must paralyse all hope.

I must be thy sad servant evermore.

Endymion will at last 'wed sorrow'—he will give up all attempts to reconcile his life and his aspirations, he will accept his fate, and, worse still, will joy in it.

The world is growing old, and there is nothing beyond it: he will content himself with that which is now and here. He will have no more of dreaming. The present is his; the present shall suffice him.

*Woe!*

*Woe! Woe* to that Endymion! Where is he?

If he contents himself with life as it is he is lost. Was it for this that he had passed from the well and the rose-trees—that he had stood alone on the misty headland: that he had mastered his fate among the precipices, that he had sounded the depths of the ocean world—that his sorrow and his pity and his love should

bring him to despair and the acceptance of a destiny which could never content him ?

Woe !

Woe ! Woe to that Endymion ! Where is he ?  
Even these words went echoing dismally  
Through the wide forest—a most fearful tone,  
Like one repenting in his latest moan.

It is the spirit's hour of keenest trial. It is undone for ever if it accepts inertly things as they are. The cry of its hopelessness is then—

There never lived a mortal man who bent  
His appetite beyond his natural sphere,  
But starved and died.

Caverns lone, farewell !

And air of visions, *and the monstrous swell*  
*Of visionary seas !* No never more  
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore  
Of tangled wonder.

But the soul has yet to learn its deepest spiritual lesson, that no love is true which does not realise itself as part of a greater whole—that all that is beautiful is One. The limited, sensuous love melts even in Endymion's grasp, leaving him unsatisfied and longing.

By Nemesis ! I see my spirit flit  
Alone about the dark.

And then he enters the wondrous cave.



There lies a den  
Beyond the seeming confines of the space  
Made for the soul to wander in and trace  
Its own existence, of remotest glooms.  
Dark regions are around it, where the tombs  
Of buried grief the spirit sees, but scarce  
One hour doth linger weeping, for the pierce  
Of new-born woe it feels more inly smart :  
And in these regions many a venom'd dart  
At random flies : they are the proper home  
Of every ill ; the man is yet to come  
Who hath not journey'd in this native hell.  
But few have ever felt how calm and well  
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.  
There anguish does not sting, nor pleasure pall :  
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,  
Yet all is still within and desolate.  
Beset with painful gusts, within ye hear  
No sound so loud as when on curtain'd bier  
The death-watch tick is stifled. Enter none  
Who strive therefor : on the sudden it is won.  
Just when the sufferer begins to burn  
Then it is free to him : and from an urn  
Still fed by melting ice, he takes a draught—  
Young Semele such richness never quaffed  
In her maternal longing. Happy gloom !  
Dark Paradise ! where pale becomes the bloom  
Of health by due : where silence dreariest  
Is most articulate : where hopes infest :  
Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep  
Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.  
O happy spirit-home ! O wondrous soul :  
Pregnant with such a den to save the whole

In thine own depth. Hail, gentle Carian !  
For never since thy griefs and woes began  
Hast thou felt so content : a grievous feud  
Hath led thee to this Cave of Quietude.  
Ay, his lull'd soul was there, although upborne  
With dangerous speed : and so he did not mourn,  
Because he knew not whither he was going.

There could not be a truer description of  
apathy. But in touching earth again the earthly  
love is found, and the temptation once more  
asserts itself in all its strength. Yet

I may not be thy love,  
I am forbidden,

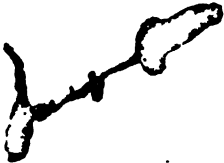
says the sad princess, and Endymion knows it  
to be true, and is roused once more to higher  
aspirations.

Not ignorant though  
That those deceptions which for pleasure go  
'Mong men, are pleasures real as pleasures may be ;  
But there are higher ones I may not see  
*If impiously an earthly realm I take.*

And the end of the story seems to slip from  
our grasp, shadowy, intangible, yet a glorious  
vision, with 'more of the music, and less of the  
'words.'

It is only when Endymion has gained a  
wider power of vision, when he has learnt that

true freedom is freedom from his own individual and limited desires and aims, and when he wishes thus to command his fate, that the Indian princess turns upon him with the face of his own beloved, and he knows that all love and beauty is one, that the truth of the finite is the truth of the infinite, that the fitful and dimly realised beauty in common life and the beauty gained through suffering is one with the beauty of light and of joy, and that it was necessary some change should spiritualise him into this belief. Being made one with eternal and universal love, the spirit is at rest for ever.



IN 'Hyperion' Keats took for his theme the fall of the Titans, the dethronement by Jupiter of Saturn the son of Cœlus and Terra, a myth which may have represented the passing away of the elemental worship of the Greeks and the change to the worship of the Olympian deities. It was a vast subject, and one in which the complex mind of Keats would specially luxuriate. Deeply imbued as he was by this time with the true spirit of nature, he entered as few could have done into the pathos of the transition from the worship of the Titanic forces of nature to the newer dynasty in which the personification of human qualities was represented, and at the same time the growing intensity of his poetic vision and his increasing power of philosophic thought made him see the hope that linked all change with the progress of mankind.

We cannot tell what was to have been the plan of the great poem, for only two complete books and a broken fragment of a third remain to us ; but it is probable that it grew from the sequence of thought in 'Endymion,' and that the idea underlying 'Hyperion' is the unity of all existence, just as 'Endymion' seems to illustrate the reconciliation of the various elements of the individual soul.

In its stately power, its dignified strength, and solemn melody, 'Hyperion' fitly represents the eternal music of the world's progress, and it is not the less suggestive from being broken off abruptly.

Two versions of 'Hyperion' were commenced, and by comparing them, and remembering the influences which surrounded the poet, and the increasing maturity of his thought, we are able to gather the vast idea which underlies the grand Greek myth in his mind. The workmanship in itself shows an immense advance upon 'Endymion,' though it lacks something of its freshness and originality, and is more obviously formed on models. Keats said himself

that he had been studying Dryden before he wrote it, and Spenser and Milton had long been his masters.

'Hyperion' is a more classical production than 'Endymion.' It contains no digressions or reflections, its great scenes and its great thoughts are expressed with simple force, and follow one another with purpose and meditated strength. All the words are weighed and musically appraised, they fall with fitness into their places, and seem under complete mastery, so that the effect is severe and almost unimpassioned.

From the vastness of its leading thoughts it is more removed from human interest than 'Endymion,' but it expresses entirely the subject of which it treats, for there is in it a calm and patient regret for the past mingled with the shining hope of the future.

The Titans have fallen, Saturn is deposed, the golden age is over, the 'large utterance of 'the early gods' is heard no more ; but through all the changes of the many 'the One remains,' linking the Present with the Past, and both with the unknown Future.

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,  
A power more strong in beauty, born of us,  
And fated to excel us as we pass,  
In glory that old Darkness.

Such is surely the great prophecy of 'Hyperion,' following upon the sweet secret of 'Endymion,' and in the time which elapsed between the composition of the two, the mind of the poet has passed from the vague moonlight, with its intangible hopefulness, into the strong sunlight,

Pervading all the beetling gloomy steeps,  
All the sad spaces of oblivion,  
And every gulf and every chasm old,  
And every height and every sullen depth.

It is the great vision of him who loves his race, the poet, whose guerdon for the suffering of the present is the large hope of the future and the belief in the final triumph of light over darkness.

There is a remarkable passage in the rejected version of 'Hyperion' which shows how strongly both the love of humanity and the burden of the poet's vocation began to weigh upon the heart of Keats. This early version of the poem is called 'A Vision,' and the poet speaks in it in

his own person, which he does not do in the second version.

In his dream he approaches a temple, and such a numbness creeps over him that he seems near death. He drags himself with suffering to the lowest step near the shrine, but as he touches it new life is given to him, and he springs up joyously to where the veiled shadow is awaiting him.

‘High Prophetess,’ said I, ‘purge off,  
‘Benign if so it please thee, my mind’s film.’  
‘None can usurp this height,’ returned that shade,  
*‘But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.’*

‘Are there not thousands in the world,’ said I,  
‘Who love their fellows even to the death,  
Who feel the giant agony of the world,  
And more, like slaves to poor humanity,  
Labour for mortal good? I sure should see  
Other men here, but I am here alone.’

And in her reply the shadow draws a distinction between those who can give practical help in the world, and those whose genius compels them only to see and to suffer: The shrine to which the poet has come is the shrine of genius, and genius is compelled to suffering



by reason of its union with the many : it is the dreamer of dreams, the prophet and the seer.

‘Those whom thou spakest of are no visionaries,  
Rejoin’d that voice ; ‘they are no dreamers weak,  
They seek no wonder but the human face,  
No music but a happy noted voice.’

Such are they who, with single hearts and loving, ready hands, can help their brother men ; seeing but one object at a time, ready always for the duty which lies nearest to them, with limited vision which fulfils itself. These are ‘the willing ‘slaves to poor humanity,’ and labour for mortal good ; but they do not know the shrine to which genius has aspired. Genius has an element of weakness in it ; it does not render its sons more happy or more helpful ; on the contrary, it increases infinitely the capacity for suffering, and by its overwhelming scope of vision paralyses ready action. The happy, hopeful workers may be thankful that it is not their lot.

They come not here, they have no thought to come,  
*And thou art here, for thou art less than they.*  
What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,  
To the great world ? Thou art a dreaming thing,  
A fever of thyself : think of the earth.

What bliss even in hope is there for thee ?  
What haven ? Every creature hath its home,  
Every *sole* man hath days of joy and pain,  
Whether his labours be sublime or low,  
The pain alone, the joy alone distinct.  
Only the dreamer venoms all his days,  
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.

It is the poet's doom which he has found,  
the prophetic vision which cannot but be  
dimmed with tears for what is and shall be,  
the larger heart which suffers in proportion to  
its power of joy, the finer ear which is filled with  
the minor wail of a suffering world while it  
awaits the final harmony. She who speaks to  
the poet is Moneta, the sister of the deposed  
Saturn, and the description given of her in the  
rejected version is full of beauty.

Then saw I a wan face  
Not pined by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd  
By an immortal sickness which kills not.  
It works a constant change, which happy death  
Can put no end to ; deathward progressing  
To no death was that visage ; it had past  
The lily and the snow : and beyond these  
I must not think now, though I saw that face.

With the exception of these quotations, most  
of what was best in the first version of 'Hyperion'  
is merged in the second, which gained immea-

surably by its reconstruction in condensation of language and expansion of thought.

How familiar the music of the opening lines of the second version has grown to us.

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat grey-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair :  
Forest on forest hung about his head,  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell there did it rest.  
A stream went voiceless by, still deaden'd more  
By reason of his fallen divinity,  
Spreading a shade : the Naiad 'mid her reeds  
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.  
Along the margin sand large footmarks went  
No further than to where his feet had stray'd,  
And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground  
His old right hand lay, nerveless, listless, dead,  
Unscptred : and his realmless eyes were closed,  
While his bow'd head seem'd listening to the earth,  
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet.

And to Saturn in his sorrowing sleep there comes his sister Thea, 'a goddess of the infant 'world,' and the 'tender spouse of gold Hyperion.'

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How beautiful if sorrow had not made  
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self ;

for in her face there is a 'listening fear.' She  
seems to see the darkness of the time to come,  
with no light beyond it, and one hand is pressed

upon that aching spot  
Where beats the human heart, as if just there,  
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain.

But though she has no comfort she has the  
unlimited sympathy of a goddess to give, and  
she has brought it to the old king. Words of  
mourning and pity come from her parted lips  
'in solemn tenor, and deep organ tone.'

I have no comfort for thee, no, not one.  
I cannot say O wherefore sleepest thou ?  
For heaven is parted from thee, and the earth  
Knows thee not thus afflicted for a god.  
And ocean too, with all its solemn noise,  
Has from thy sceptre pass'd : and all the air  
Is emptied of thine hoary majesty.  
Thy thunder, conscious of the new command,  
Rumbles reluctant o'er our fallen house,  
And thy sharp lightning in unpractised hands  
Scorches and burns our once serene domain.  
O aching time ! O moments big as years !  
All as ye pass swell out the monstrous truth  
And press it so upon our weary griefs,

That unbelief has not a space to breathe.  
Saturn, sleep on ;

We seem to hear 'the large utterance' of that  
solemn voice like the one gradual solitary gust  
which comes upon the silence ; we see the sad  
goddess weeping by the frozen god,

Until at length old Saturn lifted up  
His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone,  
And all the gloom and sorrow of the place,  
And that fair kneeling goddess, and then spake.

In her pitying gaze he reads his doom, she  
must make him sure of his own identity, for can  
it be that he is still Saturn who has been wor-  
shipped? What power was it that had been  
strong enough to make him desolate, and bring  
him away from exercising his godlike powers

Of admonitions to the winds and seas,  
Of peaceful sway above man's harvesting,  
And all those acts which deity supreme  
Doth ease its heart of love in ?

Let Thea search all space, and tell him if  
she did not feel there was some power coming  
which should repossess him. It could not be that  
his kingdom was past for ever : there should yet

be battle and victory, and the old state of things revived, and triumph calm, and

Beautiful things made new for the surprise  
Of the sky-children.

He would give command, but where was he? 'This passion lifted him upon his feet.' He would create another universe. 'Where is 'another chaos? where?' It was no wonder that that cry should cause 'the rebel three' to quake when it reached Olympus. Jupiter's heaven, Neptune's ocean, and Pluto's hell might be safe as long as Saturn was in captivity; but if he founded a new kingdom outside of these, what then? There was hope in his words, and Thea caught its spark. Saturn must come with her to where the fallen Titans are assembled, and cheer them with this new creative thought, and she leads him away.

Meanwhile in other realms big tears were shed,  
More sorrow like to this and such like woe,  
Too huge for mortal tongue or pen of scribe.  
The Titans fierce, self-hid, or prison-bound,  
Groan'd for the old allegiance once more,  
And listen'd in sharp pain for Saturn's voice.

Blazing Hyperion alone among the Titan  
race had kept his sovereignty and rule, but even

he in his bright palace felt insecure, for wonderful changes were passing over his glorious courts.

While sometimes eagles' wings,  
Unseen before by gods or wondering men,  
Darkened the place, and neighing steeds were heard,  
Not heard before by gods or wondering men.

For is not all progress wrought by mysterious and subtle changes, often terrible in their action, and did not the strength of the Sun-God lie in his recognition of change as advancement, and not decay? But the immediate effect was wrath and doubt, and Hyperion entered his palace, when his day's work was done, in anger and sadness.

'Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?  
Am I to leave this haven of my rest?

Fall!—No, by Tellus and her briny robes!  
Over the fiery frontier of my realms  
I will advance a terrible right arm,  
Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,  
And bid old Saturn take his throne again.'

Then at the eastern gates of the dawn he waits through the dewy hours of the night, till the moment when he may scatter the darkness. In godlike patience he waits, for he may not hurry it,

He might not: No! though a primeval god,  
The sacred seasons might not be disturbed.

And the bright Titan, frenzied with new woes,  
Unused to bend, by hard compulsion bent  
His spirit to the sorrow of the time.

Like Saturn, he suffers, but not, like Saturn,  
hopelessly. There is a pathetic significance in  
the way in which Saturn turns to 'the earth, his  
'ancient mother,' for the comfort which comes  
not; but it is the eternal heavens which look  
down to pity and strengthen Hyperion.

And all along a dismal rack of clouds  
Upon the boundaries of day and night  
He stretch'd himself in grief and radiance faint.  
There, as he lay, the heaven with its stars  
Look'd down on him with pity, and the voice  
Of Cœlus, from the universal space,  
Thus whisper'd low and solemn in his ear,  
'O brightest of my children dear, earth-born  
And sky-engender'd—son of mysteries.'

Then after bewailing the fall of Saturn, and  
the actions of rage and passion wrought amongst  
his sons the high gods, even as he saw them  
wrought among mortals, Cœlus adds:—

Yet do thou strive; as thou art capable,  
*As thou canst move about, an evident god,*  
*And canst oppose to each malignant hour*  
*Ethereal presence.* I am but a voice,



My life is but the life of wind and tides,  
No more than winds and tides can I avail,  
But thou canst.

In these lines there seems to flash upon us as in a lightning gleam the plan and unity of the poem. Hyperion should live, conquering all and uniting all, his ethereal presence passing into other forms and living eternally, though heaven and earth might pass away. And Hyperion rose at the whisper of his great father.

And on the stars  
Lifted his curvèd lids and kept them wide  
Until it ceased : and still he kept them wide,  
And still they were the same bright patient stars.  
Then with a slow incline of his broad breast,  
Like to a diver in the pearly seas,  
Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,  
And plunged all noiseless into the deep night.

The second book opens with a marvellous picture, one which brings to us a truer realisation of the vast power of Keats than almost anything else he has done.

Just at the selfsame beat of Time's wide wings  
Hyperion slid into the rustled air,  
And Saturn gain'd with Thea that sad place  
Where Cybele and the bruised Titans mourn'd.

There is a solemn sadness about the presence

of all the feminine Titanic powers. Sad Moneta, with her cold lips, her planetary eyes, her voice of sadness ; Thea, 'in her sorrow nearer woman's 'tears'—she who would have taken Achilles by the hair and bent his neck, or 'with a finger 'stayed Ixion's wheel;' Asia, in whose expression there was 'more thought than woe;' Mnemosyne, with 'the wondrous lesson in her silent face;' Clymene sobbing 'among her tangled hair;' and Cybele, whom we remember in 'Endymion,'

Alone, alone

In sombre chariot, dark foldings thrown  
About her majesty, and front death-pale.

It is a significant touch of gloom in the great picture that this Cybele, wife of Saturn, Ops, the Titan queen, is mentioned first of all the Titan group who were gathered in 'the den where no 'insulting light could glimmer on their tears'—the rock-covered nest of woe, where the very groaning was not heard amid the thunderous roar of the waterfalls. Few of the great band were absent. 'Mnemosyne was straying in the 'world,' but most were gathered in this 'covert 'drear.'

Scarce images of life, one here, one there,  
Lay vast and edgeways ; like a dismal cirque

Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor,  
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve  
In dull November, and their chancel vault,  
The heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.

And the poet in enumerating the classic group grasps every point of mythological picturesqueness with his marvellous apprehension. Creüs with his iron mace, and the shattered rib of rock beside him ; Iapetus, with the serpent's neck in his clenched hand ; the many-headed Cottus ; Asia, dreaming of future glory, as she leans upon an elephant's tusk, with visions in her mind of

Palm-shaded temples and high rival fanes  
By Oxus or in Ganges' sacred isle.

Shadowed Enceladus raised upon his elbow, 'tiger-passioned, lion-thoughted,' plotting how to hurl mountains in the second war ; Atlas and Phorcus not far away ; and ' neighboured close ' Oceanus.

And Tethys, in whose lap  
Sobb'd Clymene among her tangled hair.  
In midst of all lay Themis, at the feet  
Of Ops, the queen, all clouded round from sight.

To this sad group there enters Saturn and Thea, and the great king is yet more sad for the sadness of those he approaches, and would have

sunk among them, but is hailed by Enceladus, whose mightiness came to him like an inspiration, and who shouts :

‘Titans, behold your god !’ at which some groan’d,  
Some started on their feet, some also shouted ;  
Some wept, some wail’d—all bow’d with reverence,  
And Ops, uplifting her black folded veil,  
Show’d her pale cheeks, and all her forehead wan,  
Her eyebrows thin and jet, and hollow eyes.  
There is a roaring in the bleak-grown pines  
When winter lifts his voice ; there is a noise  
Among immortals when a god gives sign,  
With hushing finger, how he means to load  
His tongue with the full weight of utterless thoughts,  
With thunder and with music and with pomp :  
Such noise is like the roar of bleak-grown pines,  
Which, when it ceases in this mountain’d world,  
No other sound succeeds ; but ceasing here,  
Among these fallen, Saturn’s voice therefrom  
Grew up like organ, that begins anew  
Its strain, when other harmonies, stopt short,  
Leave the dinn’d air vibrating silverly.

And Saturn cries aloud to his brethren to tell him why they desponded. When had they found their doom in the spirit-leaved book which has been his firm-based footstool ? What magical portent of the elements has foretold such a fate that they, the divinities, ‘the first-born’ of all shaped and palpable gods,’ should be cowering there ?

Yet ye are here,  
 O'erwhelm'd and spurn'd and batter'd, ye are here !  
 O Titans, shall I say arise?—Ye groan.  
 Shall I say Crouch? Ye groan. What can I then?  
 O Heaven wide ! O unseen parent dear !  
 What can I ?

In the face of Oceanus he sees 'the severe  
 'content which comes of thought and musing,  
 and from him he demands help. And the  
 answer of Oceanus, god of the sea, sophist and  
 sage, is no incitement to war, it is a teaching of  
 content—it is the great underlying thought of  
 the poem again coming out, the law of progress.

Yet listen ye who will, whilst I bring proof  
 How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop,  
*And in the proof much comfort will I give*  
*If ye will take that comfort in its truth.*  
 We fall by course of Nature's law, not force  
 Of thunder, or of Jove.

He reminds Saturn how thoroughly he has  
 sifted the atom universe, yet because he was king,  
 and blind from sheer supremacy, one avenue has  
 been shaded from his eyes,

*Through which I wandered to eternal truth.*  
 And first, as thou wast not the first of powers,  
 So art thou not the last ; it cannot be,  
 Thou art not the beginning, nor the end.

The fallen king must remember how Heaven and Earth, his parents, had been born of Chaos and Darkness, and thus the Titan rule of the present had already come through change.

From chaos and parental darkness came  
Light, the first-fruits of that intestine broil,  
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends  
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,  
And with it light, and light engendering  
Upon its own producer, forthwith touch'd  
The whole enormous matter into life.  
Upon that very hour, our parentage,  
The Heavens and the Earth, were manifest.  
Then thou first-born, and we the giant-race,  
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms.  
*Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain ;  
O folly ! for to bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,  
That is the top of sovereignty. Mark well !*  
As heaven and earth are fairer, fairer far,  
Than chaos and blank darkness, though once chief ;  
And as we show beyond that heaven and earth,  
In form and shape compact and beautiful,  
In will, in action free, companionship,  
And thousand other signs of purer life :  
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,  
A power more strong in beauty, born of us,  
And fated to excel us, as we pass  
In glory that old darkness ; nor are we  
Thereby more conquer'd than by us the rule  
Of shapeless chaos. Say, doth the dull soil  
Quarrel with the proud forests it hath fed,

And feedeth still, more comely than itself?  
 Can it deny the chiefdom of green groves?  
 Or shall the tree be envious of the dove  
 Because it cooeth, and hath snowy wings  
 To wander wherewithal and find its joys?  
 We are such forest trees, and our fair boughs  
 Have bred forth, not pale solitary doves,  
 But eagles golden-feather'd, who do tower  
 Above us in their beauty, and must reign  
 In right thereof: for 'tis the eternal law,  
 That first in beauty should be first in might.  
 Yea, by that law, another race may drive  
 Our conquerors to mourn as we do now.  
 Have ye beheld the young God of the Seas,  
 My disposcessor? Have ye seen his fade?  
 • Have ye beheld his chariot, foam'd along  
 By noble wingèd creatures he hath made?  
 I saw him on the calmèd waters scud,  
 With such a glow of beauty in his eyes  
 That it enforced me to bid sad farewell  
 To all my empire: farewell sad I took,  
 And hither came, to see how dolorous fate  
 Had wrought upon ye; and how I might best  
 Give consolation in this woe extreme.  
*Receive the truth, and let it be your balm.*

There was silence when Oceanus had ceased  
 speaking, and no one heeded when Clymene  
 sobbed forth her story of the pleasant shore  
 upon which she had sat, and poured out her  
 grief until the flood of melody came upon her  
 which made her cast away the shell into which  
 she had breathed the music of their woes.

A voice came sweeter, sweeter than all tune,  
And still it cried Apollo ! young Apollo !  
The morning bright Apollo ! young Apollo !

And then she knew that change had come,  
that this was the 'fresh perfection,' that the  
Titanic supremacy was over, that 'the power  
'more strong in beauty' had overtaken them,  
and that they were already of the past.

Then spoke the huge Enceladus, with the  
voice

like sullen waves

In the half-glutted hollows of reef rocks,

the very incarnation of the spirit of a self-centered  
present, which looks neither to the teaching of  
the past nor the hope of the future, but will work  
for itself now. Why should they listen to the  
over-wise Oceanus or the over-foolish Clymene ?  
He will rouse them to action which knows no  
content with fate. Have they forgotten the  
blows, the buffets vile of Jupiter ? O joy ! he  
sees he has roused their wrath once more.

O joy ! for now I see ye are not lost.

O joy ! for now I see a thousand eyes

Wide glaring for revenge.

He rises to his feet. They are flames. He  
will teach them how to burn, and Jove shall feel



them. Not that he too has not his moments of regret for the calm existence of long ago,

That was before we knew the wingèd thing,  
Victory, might be lost, or might be won.

But there was one whom they had forgotten  
—there was hope for them yet—there was still  
Hyperion.

And be ye mindful that Hyperion,  
Our brightest brother, still is undisgraced—  
Hyperion, lo ! his radiance is here.

And while they gazed upon the face of  
Enceladus it was lit up with a pallid gleam as  
the name of Hyperion crossed his lips, and he,  
in his turn looking upon them, saw a gleam of  
light on every face,

But splendor in Saturn's whose hoar locks,  
Shone like the bubbling foam about a keel  
When the prow sweeps into a midnight cove.

And then it had come, the everlasting light  
which touched all sorrows and which linked all  
times, the strong Sun-God invincible.

In pale and silver silence they remain'd,  
Till suddenly a splendour, like the morn,  
Pervaded all the beetling gloomy steeps,  
All the sad spaces of oblivion,  
And every gulf and every chasm old,  
And every height, and every sullen depth

Voiceless or hoarse with loud tormented streams ;  
And all the everlasting cataracts,  
And all the headlong torrents far and near,  
Mantled before in darkness and huge shade,  
Now saw the light and made it terrible.  
It was Hyperion :—a granite peak  
His bright feet touch'd, and then he staid to view  
The misery his brilliance had betray'd,  
To the most hateful seeing of itself.

It was the light which streams across the ages, the light of hope and progress which binds into one all mystery and worship, all beauty and all love.

But as yet Hyperion had only a dim foreshadowing that hope and life were hidden in the 'death and darkness' around him, or that he should still rise, still live in the kingdom that was coming, and that change was not decay, but growth. He stood there 'the dejected King of 'Day.'

A vast shade

In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk  
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun,  
To one who travels from the dusking East.  
Sighs too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp,  
He utter'd, while his hands contemplative  
He press'd together, and in silence stood.

Then when the Titans raised the cry of

.. 'Saturn,' Hyperion answered them from the peak, but

Saturn sat near the mother of the gods,  
In whose face was no joy, though all the gods  
Gave from their hollow throats the name of Saturn.

From 'the tumults dire' of the Titans,  
Keats turns with an evident relief in the third book to the glorious coming of Apollo, the son of Jupiter, the father of all poetry.

Thus in alternate uproar and sad peace  
Amazéd were those Titans utterly.  
O leave them Muse! O leave them to their woes,  
For thou art weak to sing such tumults dire.  
A solitary sorrow best befits  
Thy lips, and antheming a lonely grief.  
Leave them, O Muse, for thou anon wilt find  
Many a fallen old divinity  
Wandering in vain about bewilder'd shores.

But this is the time for rejoicing. The whole world shall rejoice, for 'Apollo is once more the 'golden theme.'

Where was he, when the Giant of the Sun  
Stood bright, amid the sorrow of his peers?

It was that early dawn which had waked his new life, it was the strength of Hyperion which had passed into him, for in the morning twi-

light he had wandered out among the osiers of the rivulet, ankle deep in lilies, and his soul had gathered the beauty of the morning of the world into itself until he had wept.

Then through the cumbrous boughs  
With solemn step an awful goddess came,

and he asked of her melodiously,

How camest thou over the unfooted sea?  
Or hath that antique mien and robèd form  
Moved in these vales invisible till now?  
Sure I have heard those vestments sweeping o'er  
The fallen leaves, when I have sate alone  
In cool mid-forest. Surely I have traced  
The rustle of those ample skirts about  
These grassy solitudes, and seen the flowers  
Lift up their heads, as still the whisper pass'd,  
Goddess! I have beheld those eyes before  
And their eternal calm, and all that face,  
Or I have dream'd. 'Yes,' said the supreme shape,  
'Thou hast dream'd of me; and awaking up,  
Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side,  
Whose strings touch'd by thy fingers, all the vast  
Unwearied ear of the whole universe  
Listen'd in pain and pleasure at the birth  
Of such new tuneful wonder.'

It was Mnemosyne, sister of Saturn, who had been watching over Apollo since his birth. More intent on the new beauty which should

flood the world, than on the passing power of  
her mighty kindred, she had

forsaken old and sacred thrones  
For prophecies of him, and for the sake  
Of loveliness new-born.

And her words wake the soul of Apollo  
within him.

With sudden scrutiny and gloomless eyes  
he feels the dawning of his power. His first con-  
sciousness is to recognise numbness, then the  
new tide of life takes possession of him, earth  
cannot bound his longing.

Are there not other regions than this isle ?  
What are the stars ? There is the sun, the sun !  
And the most patient brilliance of the moon !  
And stars by thousands ! Point me out the way  
To any one particular beauteous star,  
And I will flit into it with my lyre,  
And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss.

He questions eagerly, of the powers that are  
and have been, what divinity commands the  
elements,

While I here idle listen on the shores,  
In fearless, yet in aching ignorance.

But there is no answer from Mnemosyne. He  
can but read 'the wondrous lesson in her silent

'face,' for the new knowledge must come to himself, and the new life must be ushered in with suffering.

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush  
All the immortal fairness of his limbs,  
Most like the struggle at the gate of death,  
Or liker still to one who should take leave  
Of pale immortal death, and with a pang  
As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse  
Die into life : so young Apollo anguish'd ;  
His very hair, his golden tresses famed,  
Kept undulation round his eager neck.  
During the pain Mnemosyne upheld  
Her arms as one who prophesied.—At length  
Apollo shrieked ;—and lo ! from all his limbs  
Celestial . . .

And with this death into new life the wondrous fragment breaks off. It was a fit ending. We long to have known the whole story, but we have to rest content that it leaves Apollo born for the world and Hyperion still unconquered ; progress triumphant, even through disastrous change and keenest suffering, and unity eternal.

## VI.

IT is like coming down from mountain heights to carefully cultured gardens when we pass from 'Hyperion' to the two poems which appear almost as if in contrast to each other in the last volume which Keats published—the story of love and despair in 'Isabella,' and of love and joy in the 'Eve of St. Agnes.'

The first named is taken from Boccaccio, and it required the magic and rare grace of a Keats to lift the hideous details of the story from the region of simple horror to that of tragedy.

The story is one from which in its natural dress the mind revolts. Isabella and Lorenzo love each other, but Isabella's brothers would have their sister marry a wealthier suitor, that their own gains may be increased. They therefore murder Lorenzo, and hide him in a

wood. Through a vision Isabella is led to discover his hidden body, and, with her own hands severing the head from the trunk of the corpse, she brings it home, hides it in a flower-pot, and plants sweet basil over it. The plant flourishes as by magic, but the brothers discover the hideous secret which lies at the root of it, and remove it. The effect of the horror is so great upon them that they fly to other lands, and, having lost her sole comfort, Isabella dies. Such are the ugly details, but in the hands of Keats they have been wrought into a story, so human, so thrilling, so full of pathos and of melody, that we forget its ugliness.

In the opening description of how Isabella and Lorenzo first know that they love, we feel that the poet has been touched with some new and profoundly human knowledge himself.

They could not sit at meals but feel how well  
It soothed each to be the other by.

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,  
Before the door had given her to his eyes.

And to his heart he inwardly did pray  
For power to speak ; but still the ruddy tide  
Stifled his voice and pulsed resolve away,



Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,  
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child :  
Alas ! when passion is both meek and wild.

This is a truer description of passion than anything in 'Endymion.' And how wonderfully in a few words the money-loving, griping spirit of the two brothers, the 'men of ancestral merchandise,' is put before us, and what an insight the same words give us into the growing sympathy of Keats with mankind, a sympathy which had he lived could not have failed to have wrought some deliverance. It was a wondrous insight which recognised the half-ignorance with which the rich permit the agonising of the poor who toil to enrich them,—'the evil wrought by want of thought.'

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,  
And went all naked to the hungry shark ;  
For them his ears gush'd blood : for them in death  
The seal on the cold ice, with piteous bark,  
Lay full of darts ; for *them alone did seethe*  
*A thousand men in troubles wide and dark ;*  
*Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,*  
*That set sharp racks at work to pinch and peel.*

Why were they proud ? Because their marble founts  
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears ?  
Why were they proud ? Because fair orange-mounts  
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs ?

Why were they proud? Because red-lined accounts  
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years.  
Why were they proud? Again we ask aloud,  
Why, in the name of glory, were they proud?

And when Lorenzo says his unconscious  
farewell, what utter pathos is condensed in  
Isabella's ignorance of coming sorrow.

And as he went, she chanted merrily.

With that farewell Lorenzo's life ended; the  
few hours of existence left to him were nothing,  
with the parting from Isabella his true life was  
over. This is the significance of the words:—

So the two brothers and their *murdered man*  
Rode past fair Florence.

A few more hours and he was dead.

There in the forest did his great love cease.

No one perhaps except Shakespeare among  
our poets has brought more of the supernatural  
and ghostly element into words than these two  
stanzas in Isabella's vision of the murdered man  
contain:—

I am a shadow now, alas! alas!  
Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling  
Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,  
While little sounds of life are round me knelling,

And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,  
And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,  
Paining me through : those sounds grow strange to me,  
And thou art distant in Humanity.

I know what was, I feel full well what is,  
And I should rage if spirits could go mad ;  
Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,  
That paleness warms my grave, as though I had  
A seraph chosen from the bright abyss  
To be my spouse : thy paleness makes me glad :  
Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel  
A greater love through all my essence steal.

And then the girl who had thought 'the worst  
' was simple misery ' wakes to the knowledge that  
life contained even a harder fate, and rouses her-  
self to the horrible task. But the story grows  
too ghastly in its 'wormy circumstance,' the poet  
himself quails before it, his voice falters, we feel  
him shudder as he bids us go and read it in  
Boccaccio for ourselves. With the bringing back  
of the hideous burden the fierceness of Isabella's  
madness is past, she has sunk into a quiet mel-  
ancholy, which has found comfort in the worship  
of the external symbol of her love.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,  
And she forgot the blue above the trees,  
And she forgot the dells where waters run,  
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze.

She had no knowledge when the day was done,  
And the new moon she saw not : but in peace  
Hung over her sweet basil evermore,  
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

When the brothers suspect her secret, and steal away the basil pot, she is left to die a death '*too lone and incomplete.*'

For simple pathos in its narration and effect 'Isabella' is hardly equalled, but the poem has not the finest elements of tragedy. It represents facts with an accurate appreciation of their tenderness, of their pathos, and of their horror, but it deals with none of the wider scope of tragedy. The action of mind upon mind, that subtle spiritual influence which moulds fact and masters circumstance, is absent : it is a story skilfully told of the broader features of passion, malice, and madness, but there is nothing in it which would lead us to believe that Keats could have made it a tragic drama, with the consequent effect upon numbers who can be influenced through sympathy with dramatic art, where mere narration however perfect fails to move them. The story is essentially one of tragical fact, but not of tragedy in its highest form.

The 'Eve of Saint Agnes' forms a remarkable pendant to it, published in the same volume, and written probably about the same time. It is in Spenserian metre, and in its completeness of expression, and perfect mastery of words, metaphor, and fancy, is not unworthy to be linked in thought with the work of the 'poet's 'poet.' The story is told with a richness of detail, an exquisite poise of imagination, a reticence which controls its enthusiastic expansion, and a grace and purity and calm which modulate its passion. It is one of the best known of the poems of Keats, and rightly, for it appeals strongly to our human feeling, though it lacks, because it does not need, the prophetic element of 'Endymion' and 'Hyperion.' It deals with the broad facts of love and life and the present, and questions none of the larger issues of the past or future. It is complete, fulfilling itself entirely within its own limits, and is therefore a more accurate *test* of the poet's power than the less defined thoughts of greater magnitude and weight which were battling for expression in his longer poems.

'Endymion' and 'Hyperion' tell with a mighty

voice what Keats might have been. 'St. Agnes' 'Eve' and some of the Odes tell what he was, and the actual degree of perfection to which he had attained.

The 'Eve of St. Agnes' is the most picturesque of all the poems of Keats, its descriptions by far the most artistic. He creates an atmosphere first, he passes on to the creation of facts and circumstance and every sensuous detail which can promote reality; and then, when his world is ready, he puts into it his man and woman, living, breathing, and one with us.

How completely we are made to feel the effect of that atmosphere in the opening lines.

St. Agnes' Eve.—Ah ! bitter chill it was, .  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold,  
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold :  
Numb were the beadsman's fingers while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censer old,  
Seem'd taking flight for heaven without a death,  
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

And what a wonderful contrast is that old shivering beadsman, the patient holy man who has passed by the joys and sorrows of his

human life, and has only a prayer left for others since nothing can touch or alter his own fate, to the fairy power that is abroad, which has been in the mind of the young Madeline through that long day preceding the vigil.

The music, yearning like a god in pain,  
She scarcely heard ;

for her heart is full of visions of delight which that very night may hold if she lies down supperless, looking neither behind nor sideways, but only upwards to heaven. Shall she not see him whom she loves ? And thinking upon this as the charmed hour draws near, how can she do anything but 'dance along with vague 'regardless eyes ?' Meanwhile her lover, young Porphyro, unknown to her has come across the moors, not indeed to be admitted to the dance, but raging with jealousy outside against the barbarian hordes admitted to the privileges denied to him.

Beside the portal doors,  
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores  
All saints to give him sight of Madeline.

He has but one friend who cares for his success, an old beldame weak in body and in

soul. By her he is found behind the broad hall pillar, and, terrified for his fate, she implores him to fly, enumerating the lovers of Madeline who are assembled, and may do him an injury. Her fears increase with every moment. He vainly endeavours to extract from her any of that knowledge which he craves. She beckons him away from his danger through the 'lowly arched 'way' to the little moonlit room, where they are safe from prying eyes. It is the Eve of St. Agnes? Yes, but what of that? It is in vain for him to remind her of it, for men will murder upon holy days. His foolhardiness even makes the old crone laugh as she goes on to tell him the purpose and hope of Madeline about the rites of that evening. Will she dream of him? A wild thought crosses him, which shapes itself into purpose with that readiness which sudden thoughts often have for prompt action. If he were but near, her visions must surely be influenced by his unseen presence.

The old woman is quickly persuaded. Porphyro, whom she prays for morning and evening, can do no wrong. She will hide him in the closet of Madeline's room, where he may see her



without being seen, and possibly influence her dreams on this auspicious night.

No touch is wanting in the portrait of old Angela. We can hear her as she hobbles off to get the dainty cates with which to store that closet, as though to please children and to fulfil the rites of this sacred eve. We see the aged eyes aghast 'from fright of dim espial' and the whispered summons to Porphyro to follow her to the chamber, 'silken, hush'd, and chaste.' And leaving the lover hidden, we follow the poor old terrified woman as she feels tremblingly for the stair, till Madeline suddenly rises before her, like a missioned spirit, in the light of the silver taper she is carrying, and guides her faltering footsteps with pious care to the safe level matting.

And then with Madeline we enter the hushed maiden chamber—the taper going out in the pallid moonshine as the door is opened. With the closing of the door the awe of the spell-bound night falls upon us. There is no backward glance, no word spoken by the young girl, but 'to her heart, her heart was voluble.' And what a picture is before us in the next two stanzas.

The room might be of Spenser's describing, and the lady one of Shakespeare's ; indeed, we might almost believe that Keats had 'a thing ensky'd 'and sainted' in his mind.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,  
All garlanded with carven imageries  
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass :  
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes  
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings :  
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries  
And twilight saints and dim emblazonings,  
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and  
kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;  
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,  
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
And on her hair a glory like a saint :  
She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest,  
Save wings, for heaven : Porphyro grew faint :  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

We can almost hear the breathing of these two, as Madeline sleeps and Porphyro steals from his hiding-place, 'noiseless as fear in a wide 'wilderness,' to look upon her, gazing in passing on her empty dress, listening to make sure she still breathed, then softly parting the curtains to see her,

Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,  
As though a rose should shut and be a bud again.

Far off comes the sound of the music below,  
in that common world which knows nothing of  
his joy, the boisterous midnight festive clarion  
breaking rudely upon his holy vision. He is  
thankful when the hall door is shut for the last  
time, and the noise is all over.

There is something of almost childish  
minuteness in the way in which the feast which  
Porphyro spreads is described. We can under-  
stand that it had a certain charm for the poet  
who described his liking for claret and peaches.  
But how completely is the description lifted out  
of commonplace by the magical atmosphere  
which is made to surround the cates, with allu-  
sion to the places from which they came,

Manna and dates, in argosy transferred  
From Fez : and spiced dainties every one,  
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

Instantly the golden glowing East breaks  
upon us and mingles with the mediæval room,  
adding its glory in a word or two to the moonlit  
scene. But Madeline sleeps on. Porphyro takes  
her lute and plays, to wake her, the old Pro-

vençal song, 'La belle dame sans merci,' and then she is roused, and he is frightened at what he has done, and kneels, pale as 'smooth-sculptured stone.'

And so the spell proves true. She has dreamed of him, of her own lover, whom she had heard singing in her sleep. Why does he look so sadly now? What? It is he himself! 'Into her dream he melted.' She is won. The storm may rave, the sleet may patter against the window pane, but her joy is no dream. Should he even forsake her after this she can only say,

I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine.

The loud gusts rave and beat outside, contrasting weirdly with the joy within, and Porphyro will have it that it is an elfin storm from faery land to help their flight. The moon of St. Agnes has set, it is near morning, he has 'a home waiting for her far o'er the southern moors,' and the sleepy wassailers will not hear them as they fly. Noiselessly like phantoms they steal into the hall and to the iron porch, past the sleeping porter and more watchful bloodhound,

who recognises Madeline, and allows her to go quietly. The key turns, the door groans on its hinges,

And they are gone : ay, ages long ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm.

Bridging all time, old and yet ever new, the story melts away like the glowing vision of a charmed and spellbound night.

Widely different from the pathos and horror of 'Isabella,' and the passionate joy of 'St. Agnes' Eve,' is the story of 'Lamia,' and even further does it seem removed from the idealism of 'Endymion.' It has been described by Lord Houghton as 'quite the perfection of narrative 'poetry,' but beyond this it is the expression of a new phase of feeling in Keats himself. It is contemporary with his love for Fanny Brawne, and illustrates the conflict of a mind with its own contradictory elements. 'Endymion' has represented the realisation of an ideal love, 'Lamia' represents the struggle between an overmastering passion and philosophy. In one of the letters to Fanny Brawne, written in July 1819, the poet says: 'Forgive me if I wander a little 'this evening, for I have been all day employed in

'a *very abstract* poem, and I am deep in love 'with you.' And writing to Mr. Reynolds a few days before, we find him saying, 'I have proceeded pretty well with "*Lamia*," finishing the 'first part, which consists of about 400 lines.' It is presumable, therefore, that the 'very abstract 'poem' was '*Lamia*,' which represented far more truly what was passing in the mind of Keats than his letters did. It is hardly conceivable that he should at such a time have written such a poem, had it not been a relief to the feverish restlessness of his heart, occupied as it was with a passion which absorbed but could not satisfy him. The story is from Burton's '*Anatomy of Melancholy*,' of the wondrous serpent-woman who fascinated the Corinthian youth Lycius to his doom, and the weird subject is a curious contrast to the careful and restrained composition which was influenced by the study of Dryden.

It is noticeable how much the thought of the changes in the beliefs of the world was dominant with Keats at this time. The great thought of '*Hyperion*' appears in a lesser form in the opening lines of '*Lamia*,' the date of the story being

fixed before 'the faery broods had driven away  
'the nymph and satyr,' before Oberon and his  
train had displaced the dryads and fauns.  
Keats's intuitive sense of the unity of all times is  
one of the most remarkable proofs of his genius.  
Time and space to him were no fettering limita-  
tions, they defined without narrowing the realms  
he peopled by his imagination.

It was in the far off elemental age that  
Hermes, in search of a nymph to whom 'all  
'hoofed satyrs knelt,' heard the voice which in  
a gentle heart destroys 'all pain but pity,' and  
found the palpitating snake bewailing its cruel  
doom.

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,  
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue ;  
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd,  
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,  
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed  
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries ;  
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,  
She seem'd at once some penanced lady elf,  
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.  
Upon her crest she bore a wannish fire,  
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar ;  
Her head was serpent, but, ah, bitter sweet !  
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete ;  
And for her eyes, what could such eyes do there

But weep, and weep that they were born so fair?  
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.  
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake  
Came, as through bubbling honey, for love's sake.

A subtle, curious picture of a complex nature,  
repelling and alluring at the same time, representing the fascinations of changing and sparkling beauty, and all the bewildering power possessed by such beauty for sensuous and receptive natures. And Hermes swears to this

Beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,  
that she shall have whatever she wishes for, if  
she will but tell him what he wants to know.  
His oath runs through her ears,

Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian,  
and she consents, if she may have once more her  
woman's form. She loves a youth in Corinth,  
and she would be where he is. She breathes  
upon the eyes of the god, that he may see his  
love, and the 'guarded nymph' he has sought is  
'near—smiling on the green.'

It was no dream, or say a dream it was,  
Real are the dreams of gods, and smoothly pass  
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.

Then, true to his word, Hermes puts to proof



'the lithe Caducean charm' with the serpent wand given him by Apollo in exchange for the lyre. Keats wrote few more marvellous descriptions than that of the transformation wrought in the swooning serpent as it passes through the horrible stages of its change to beauty—the foaming mouth, the grass withering around it, the hot glazed eyes with no tears to cool them, the convulsing of scarlet pain, the waning, and final dissolution of the serpent, and the sweet new voice of the woman which melts away with the mists around the mountain as she cries upon Lycius. And what a vision is this new-born Lamia as she rests at the foot of those wild hills between Corinth and Cenchreas' shore!

There she stood,  
About a young bird's flutter from a wood,  
Fair on a sloping green of mossy tread,  
By a clear pool, wherein she passioned  
To see herself escaped from so sore ills,  
While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.

The poet is happy now. His sun is shining : he has shaken himself free from the serpent-charm at present : it is the woman only who is clear to his vision, the woman in all her beauty and her undoubted love.

In the lore  
Of love deep learned to the red-heart's core :  
Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain,  
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain :  
Define their pettish limits, and estrange  
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange ;  
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart  
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art ;  
As though in Cupid's college she had spent  
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,  
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.

In her serpent days she had had a power of  
seeing and understanding human life, and once,  
dreaming among mortals, she had seen this  
Corinthian Lycius,

Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,

and had loved him ever since for the very contrast which that calm presented to her own complexity. Therefore she will wait for him on the solitary hills, for she knows that he has been to Egina isle, to sacrifice to Jove, and

On the moth-time of that evening dim  
He would return that way.

He was wearied of the Corinth talk of his

companions, and is coming over the hills by  
himself, thoughtless at first, then lost

In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades,  
and so passes Lamia.

In indifference drear  
His silent sandals swept the mossy green.

But she speaks, and the magic of her voice is  
enough. He is lost to philosophy for ever from  
that moment.

'Lycius, look back, and be some pity shown !'  
He did, not with cold wonder, fearingly,  
But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice,  
For so delicious were the words she sung,  
It seem'd he had loved them a whole summer long.

And soon his eyes had

drunk her beauty up,  
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,  
And still the cup was full.

Then having made him secure in her chain,  
she can be coy and confident. Where will he  
take her? He is a scholar: he must know 'that  
'finer spirits cannot breathe below.' What  
'serener palaces' has he ready for her, 'where  
'she may all her many senses please?' She

makes a feint of leaving him, only rendering his captivity more complete, and then, as he passes from trance to trance, she sings to him—

Happy in beauty, life, and love, and everything.

Lycius is enthralled, he knows nothing more than the presence of Lamia, and leads her back to Corinth. As they pass through the crowded streets he presses hard the beautiful hand he holds, for one draws near

With curl'd grey beard, sharp eyes, and smooth bald crown,  
Slow-stepp'd, and robed in philosophic gown.

Lamia shudders, for passion shuns philosophy. She perceives how Lycius tries to avoid those searching eyes, and demands the name of the old man. It is only Apollonius, his sage instructor, he answers. And then the lovers pass within the mystic, rich-portalled door, into that palace invisible to all but lovers' eyes, where for a time they are happy.

But at length the spirit of Lycius is waked once more as with a trumpet-blast, and Lamia knows that he is no longer content.

She began to moan and sigh,  
Because he mused beyond her, knowing well  
That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell.

For the man's mind is roused, and sympathies with the outer world come back to him. Why should not his new joy be linked to his larger life? He would show his bride to the world, and be a man once more among men. And she in her woe says nothing,

but, pale and meek,  
Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain  
Of sorrow at his words.

But power is a new sensation, a promise of returning strength, and he uses it to compel her to his will. There shall be a nuptial gathering: has she any kin whom she would call? She answers none—her name is unknown in Corinth. Her one request, urged strongly and resistlessly, is that Apollonius shall not be a bidden guest. And so Lycius goes forth to invite his kindred, and Lamia is left to her own sad musings.

She set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress  
The misery in fit magnificence.

The preparation of that gorgeous pageant by elfin skill is rendered pitiful in these few last words. Who were the 'subtle servitors' that came at her bidding? What magic raised that palace of delight? The palms and plantains

arching over head, the haunting music which seemed the sole support of the fairy roof, the stream of lamps, the untasted feast teeming with odours, and Lamia, regal dressed, adding final touches of beauty—where could we find a more exquisite description of the magical banquet of love? And at last the hour has come, and the ‘gossip rout’ have gathered. How subtle is the thought which represents their vacant surprise at this high-built fair demesne.

They knew the street,  
Remember’d it from childhood, all complete  
Without a gap, yet ne’er before had seen  
That royal porch.

Thus does the common herd marvel at the palace of Love whenever it is seen. The faces and the street are familiar, but what is the magical change and difference? It is the experience of every day that the glamour is wrought, and the world resents its own ignorance, and hurries in at the royal porch, mazed, curious, and keen as the guests of Lycius.

But one guest comes unbidden to the feast. Among the fifty censers of myrrh and spiced wood, among the twelve sphered tables with

their silken seats upraised on libbards' paws, the  
heavy gold of cups and goblets, and the merry  
shining wine ; among

the gorgeous dyes,

The space, the splendour of the draperies ;

and the 'nectarous cheer,' there enters Apol-  
lonius.

Do not all charms fly

At the mere touch of cold philosophy ?

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven :

We know her woof, her texture : she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.

Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line.

Even while Lycius would pledge him, the old  
philosopher's eyes are fixed upon Lamia. The  
bride's hand lying in her husband's grows cold,  
then feverishly hot once more, and to the mad-  
dened appeal of Lycius she returns no answer.  
She is fading, she knows him no longer, the  
music is hushed.

By faint degrees, voice, lute, and pleasure ceased,

A deadly silence step by step increased,

Until it seem'd a horrid presence there,

And not a man but felt the terror in his hair.

'Lamia !' he shriek'd, and nothing but the shriek,

With its sad echo, did the silence break.

In vain he cries to her, in vain he reviles

Apollonius. From Lamia there is no answer,  
and the sage's voice is gruff with contempt as  
he cries, Fool !

From every ill

Of life have I preserved thee to this day,  
And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey ?  
Then Lamia breathed death-breath : the sophist's eye,  
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,  
Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging : she, as well  
As her weak hand would any meaning tell,  
Motion'd him to be silent : vainly so :  
He look'd and look'd again a level—No !  
'A serpent !' echoed he : no sooner said,  
Than, with a frightful scream, she vanish'd ;  
And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,  
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.  
On the high couch he lay—his friends came round,  
Supported him, no pulse of breath they found,  
And in its marriage robe the heavy body wound.

The poem of 'Lamia' illustrates the discordance arising from a limited apprehension of love, as 'Endymion' represents the harmony to be gained from extended vision ; and it is not difficult to see the stage in life to which Keats had come when it was written. It was much more truly the time of which he had prophesied when 'the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted,' the time which was



expressed in 'Otho the Great' as 'yeasting  
'youth;' when philosophy is at strife with the  
enthrallment of the passions, the mind not  
having recognised the true unity of life, and  
the man being partially conscious of that which  
is strength in him and that which is weakness,  
yet aware too that the glamour around him has  
beauty of its own which has claims upon him as  
strong as those of philosophy.

It is a truth that the sophist's eye destroys  
the beautiful vision, but it is not the less sad for  
being true, nor does it save the heart of Lycius  
from breaking.

## VII.

THE consideration of the elements of human interest in the poems of Keats would not be materially influenced by closer investigation of the tragedy of 'Otho the Great' or the unfinished fragment of 'The Cap and Bells.'

The tragedy of Otho is so obviously not the spontaneous work of Keats, that we can gather nothing of his individuality from it, though every here and there some flash of illuminated thought makes us recognise the young master hand.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As, for instance, when Ludolph says of Auranthe :—

'Long have I loved thee, yet till now not loved,  
Remembering, as I do, hard-hearted times,  
When I had heard e'en of thy death perhaps,  
And thoughtless,—suffered thee to pass alone  
Into Elysium ! Now I follow thee,  
A substance or a shadow, wheresoe'er  
Thou ledest me—whether thy white feet press,  
With pleasant weight, the amorous aching earth,  
Or through the air thou pioneerest me,  
A shade.'

Or, again, when he has killed the deceiver, Albert.

'There goes a spotted soul  
Howling in vain along the hollow night.'

The story is one of the sudden revelation of treachery changing love into overmastering revenge, and it is heavy in its incident, and not specially original in its circumstance. It is a drama without true dramatic inspiration, and contains none of the finer points of contact in character and none of the subtle delineations of personality which give the drama its strongest power over the imagination. The situations are startling, but not picturesque or graphic, and the dialogue is too often explanatory without being interesting. Yet we cannot help looking on it tenderly, for it has beautiful touches of Keats in it here and there, and it was the first dramatic work attempted by the man who desired above all things to be a dramatist, who said his ambition was 'to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean had done in acting,' and who felt Shakespeare every day become a greater wonder to him.

There is far more of the power which might have made Keats a dramatist shown in the wonderful ballad called 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' than in either of his premeditated attempts at dramatic writing. When the knight

tells the story of 'the latest dream he ever dreamed,' every line is a dramatic incident, every word is strongly and carefully chosen. The story so simply related reveals itself as tragedy, which the scenery of 'the cold hill side,' 'the lake where no birds sing,' and the horrors of the elfin cave skilfully heightens. We leave the poem with a longing that Keats had been able to enrich our literature with many more ballads of the same terse power.

In 'The Cap and Bells' Keats seems to have been writing partly for recreation and partly in scornful accordance with the public taste, which claimed to be amused by the poets of the day. It was commenced under the influence of the study of Ariosto, and it flows over with fairy fun, the jokes of Lilliput, the mimic loves of Elfinan and Bertha, the mimic dignities of Hum and Crafticant. It is full of clever allusions and description, and is written with a freedom, ease, and mastery of words which make it a worthy study of composition, though it is unfinished and uncorrected, and does not seem thoroughly characteristic of its writer.

But to gain the truest insight into the human

development of this wondrously rich nature, we must be familiar with the Odes and Sonnets, for the genius of Keats is, perhaps, most fully expressed in the varying chords which they strike, the vibrations they create, the sympathies they awaken, and each life which they touch will interpret them for itself, and even a cursory glance at the circumstances under which some of them were written can help us to realise something of the life and personality of Keats.

The work of most poets might be divided into that which is the result of purpose and that which is the result of circumstance. The result of purpose is generally the outcome of the poet's life of inner thought, that which he has individually won for himself out of all the influences of his time, and this is his maturest work, his most deliberate expression. Such was Shelley's 'Prometheus,' Wordsworth's 'Excursion,' and such would also have been the 'Hyperion' of Keats.

But the poetry whose inspiration comes suddenly from a quickly generated sympathy with passing circumstance has a value of its own exceeding in some ways that of more premeditated

work, for it pictures to us more vividly the human life of the writer. The actual life of Keats (as moved or touched by human circumstance), which is revealed in the Odes and Sonnets, makes clearer to us the underlying human truths of 'Endymion' and 'Hyperion.' Such a poem as the 'Ode to a Nightingale' (written on scraps of paper and thrust away as waste behind some books) is a spontaneous expression of the life the poet was then living. The nightingale sang in the plum-tree at Wentworth Place, and Keats sat and listened to it, and wrote one of the saddest and sweetest poems in our language. It was written in the same year and nearly at the same time as 'Lamia,' when the shadow of his approaching doom seemed to be stealing over him, when his brother Tom, whom he had loved so well, had lately died, when he was waking to consciousness of the love that was his fate. There is noticeable all through the poem that languor and failure of the springs of life which marks the first approach of death, however distant the event may be, and that remarkably quickened sympathy with all natural life which is so often to be seen in those who are doomed

to die. It was this sympathy which made Keats write a few months later, 'How astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us! 'The simple flowers of our spring are what I want to see again.'<sup>1</sup>

It was therefore no mere poetic wish, but the expression of a real sadness, which prompted the longing 'to fade away into the forest dim' with the nightingale.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan :  
Where palsy shakes a few sad last grey hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies ;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs ;

Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

We can imagine, too, how his thoughts were haunted by the suffering of his brother's last weeks, when he wrote of being 'half in love with 'easeful death ;' and how true it is in that passion-

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson has touched on this sympathy of dying life in one of the most beautiful lines of the *May Queen*.

'I only wish to live till the snowdrops come again.'

ately loving nature, which loved even its brothers with more than the love of women, that thinking of Tom in his new-made grave, and of George far away in America, John Keats should write from his heart,

Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell,  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self.

The whole of this magical ode seems to make life vocal for us as we read it, but it also brings us very close to the wearied young heart that was nearing death.

A few months later it was the quiet Sunday walk through the stubble fields near Winchester which won for us the 'Ode to Autumn,' a walk of which Keats writes: 'I never liked stubble fields as much as now; ay, better than the chilly green of spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm in the way some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.' And who is there that has not realised the charm of that English landscape described in the

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,



and does not feel the autumnal glory which had touched the poet when he wrote:—

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue.

Of the 'Ode to Psyche' Keats says in a letter written to his brother in America, in March 1819:—'The following poem, the last I have written, is the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have for the most part dashed off my lines in a hurry: this one I have done leisurely. I think it reads the more richly for it, and it will, I hope, encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit. You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist, who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour, and perhaps never thought of in the old religion. I am more orthodox than to let a heathen goddess be so neglected.'

This note explains the careful work which

resulted in the condensation of beauty in this Ode, the wonderful music of its progress, and the exquisite spirituality of its thoughts. It is a link between 'Hyperion' and the other poems, for Psyche is

The latest born and loveliest vision far  
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy,

though she has come to the world too late for temple, shrine, or 'pale-mouth'd prophet.'

O brightest ! though too late for antique vows,  
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,  
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,  
Holy the air, the water, and the fire.

Again we feel the wondrous power of realising the past and uniting it with the present and the future, which was one of the peculiar inspirations of the genius of Keats. This link with the 'faint Olympians' has in it the very principle of continuity, the recognition of the growing soul of the ages. For that prophetic gaze, drawing from the past the undying principle of beauty, which it saw also in a distant future, found a fitness in the absence of Psyche from the deities of long ago. It is 'the latest born, 'the loveliest vision far;' it comes into the

world unrecognised and as yet unworshipped  
save by one here and there, 'who sees and sings.  
' by his own eyes inspired.' But such an one  
will be its priest, and in 'some untrodden region  
'of the mind' its sanctuary shall be made,

Where branchèd thoughts, new-grown with pleasant pain,  
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind.

The 'Ode on Melancholy' seems to have been partly influenced by the verses at the commencement of Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' which suggest that fulfilled joy is melancholy, and that the other side of every pleasure is pain. But the thought of Keats goes beyond this, he sees the sadness of all joy, and that it is not the acknowledged grief of our lives which is the secret of true melancholy, but that our gladness should be what it is. It is not the wolf's-bane, the night-shade, the yew berries, the death-moth, that are the saddest emblems; it is 'the morning rose,' 'the rainbow  
'of the salt sand-wave,' 'the wealth of globed  
'peonies,' 'the peerless eyes' of her that is loved. The most sorrowful reality of melancholy is that

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die,  
And Joy whose hand is ever at his lips,  
Bidding adieu.

A curious change was made in the original, and Lord Houghton quotes an opening verse of it which was suppressed as being disproportionately horrible to the rest. It is one of the grimmest word-pictures Keats ever drew.

Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,  
And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,  
Stitch shrouds together for a sail, with groans  
To fill it out, blood-stainèd and aghast ;  
Although your rudder be a dragon's tail  
Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony,  
Your cordage large uprootings from the skull  
Of bald Medusa, certes you would fail  
To find the melancholy—whether she  
Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull.

In the 'Ode on Indolence,' the passing and re-passing of the shadowy figures of Love, Ambition, and Poetry, and the weariness with which the poet looks at them and turns from them, brings to us the same feeling as the 'Ode to the 'Nightingale,' the failure of vitality, the beginning of the end, the appealing beauty of the flower which is about to fall. It is a depth of suffering loneliness that no human comfort could

reach or touch which speaks to us from the words,

Farewell ! I yet have visions for the night,  
And for the day faint visions there is store.

Very different is the Ode which commences,

Bards of passion and of mirth,  
Ye have left your souls on earth ;  
Have ye souls in heaven too,  
Double-lived in regions new ?

It is in a short monotonous metre, but is full of fire and of human feeling, and its joyous hopefulness contrasts with the sadness in most of the other odes.

After imagining the joys on which the souls of poets have entered,

Where the daisies are rose-scented,  
And the rose herself has got  
Perfume which on earth is not.  
Where the nightingale doth sing,  
Not a senseless tranced thing,  
But divine melodious truth ;

it goes on to glory in the thought that in their works these same souls are still living on earth, and that those who are able to receive them are prepared by them for their further life of joy, so that they are double lived.

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Thus ye live on high, and then  
On the earth ye live again ;  
And the souls ye left behind you  
Teach us, here, the way to find you,  
Where your other souls are joyi-  
Never slumber'd, never cloying.  
Here your earth-born souls still speak  
To mortals, of their little week ;  
Of their sorrows and delights,  
Of their passions and their spites,  
Of their glory and their shame,  
What doth strengthen and what maim.  
Thus ye teach us every day  
Wisdom, though fled far away.

The same idea is to be found in a less elevated form in the lines on the Mermaid Tavern.

But the wide-reaching thought, the high conception, and the repressed feeling of the 'Ode 'on a Grecian Urn' makes it perhaps the crowning glory of the shorter poems. It is the inspiration of one of those hours when the quiet of the great past seems a more powerful influence than the action of the present or purposes of the future. It is not joyful, for its thought is too calm for joy, and it is not sorrowful, for its calm is too deep for sorrow. It has gathered from all time the abiding principle of Beauty, and sees in its undying power the true friend of man.

## ODE ON A GRECIAN URN.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness !  
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme ;  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady ?  
What men or gods are these ? what maidens loath ?  
What mad pursuit ? what struggle to escape ?  
What pipes and timbrels ? what wild ecstasy ?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone ;  
Fair youth beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare.  
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve ;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair !

Ah, happy, happy boughs ! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu ;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new.  
More happy love ! more happy, happy love !  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
For ever panting and for ever young ;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea-shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of its folk this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the crodden weed;  
Thou silent form! dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: cold pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st  
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Past is made alive in these words, its  
beauty has never died, and the very material in  
which the Attic shape is wrought is infused with  
life, the love of 'the happy melodist, unwearied,'

For ever piping songs for ever new;  
the sacrifice of the mysterious priest, 'the  
'little town by river or sea-shore,' from which  
the folk have come 'this pious morn,' are real  
to us.



The 'Ode to the Nightingale' is full of a pathos and regret which are quite absent here, but the Grecian Urn represents a higher phase of thought. There is a touch of bitterness mingled with the poet's joy in the immortality of the nightingale's music.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird,  
*No hungry generations tread thee down;*  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown.

But there is no bitterness in the quieted spirit which has been so penetrated by the beauty of a bygone age that it can joy to know of this symbol of Greek calm.

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Sonnets are much more unequal than the Odes in composition, some of them rising to an inspired completeness, but some of them also containing only a few lines of abiding beauty.

Not even Wordsworth himself has entered more reverently and selflessly into the world of natural beauty than Keats, feeling its power

and part in that great whole to which man also belongs, and in the Sonnets we have much of the spontaneous expression of this sympathy.

In 'the alley where the fir-cone drops,' in the

new soft-fallen mask

Of snow upon the mountains and the moors ;

in the lone winter evening when the frost 'has wrought a silence ;' in the 'fresh-blown musk rose ;' in 'the blue of the forget-me-not ;' in the ripening of the autumn fruits and golden corn, he found for us that 'the poetry of earth is never dead.'

The sea had a special fascination for Keats. We find its influence in the idealisation of cliff scenery in 'Endymion' and in the utterances of the Titans in 'Hyperion,' which might have been inspired by the noise of waves in rocky chasms and hollow caves. One of the earliest sonnets contains the lines so crude in expression, but so pregnant with descriptive power :—

The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,  
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears,  
Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears  
Must think on what will be, and what has been.

A sonnet written in April 1817 is inspired

by the words in Lear, 'Hark, do you hear the 'sea?' and is introduced by Keats in a letter written from Carisbrooke to his friend Reynolds.

*TO THE SEA.*

It keeps eternal whisperings around  
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell  
Gluts twice ten thousand caverns, till the spell  
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.  
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,  
That scarcely will the very smallest shell  
Be moved for days from whence it sometime fell  
When last the winds of heaven were unbound.  
Oh ye ! who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,  
Feast them upon the wideness of the sea.  
Oh ye ! whose ears are dimm'd with uproar rude,  
Or fed too much with cloying melody,  
Sit ye near some old cavern's mouth, and brood  
Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quired.

This was written at the time 'Endymion' was just begun, and to the last the thought of this 'wideness of the sea' was with Keats, and associated always with comforting and restoration. In the last sonnet of all we have a wonderful parting thought of it.

Bright star ! would I were steadfast as thou art.  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart  
Like Nature's patient sleepless eremite,

*The moving waters at their priest-like task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest ;  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.*

It is always our familiar English scenery which is described by Keats, and given 'the consecration and the poet's dream,' for foreign countries were unknown to him until his time for writing was over, but this very consecration of our common world is one of his strongest claims upon our gratitude. Who that knows his poems does not now hear in the song of the thrush the warning contained in the exquisite unrhymed sonnet :—

O fret not after knowledge ! I have none,  
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.  
O fret not after knowledge ! I have none,  
And yet the evening listens ?

Who has not felt the thrill of life in the words,

when the deer's swift leap  
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell?

or has not seemed to hear the cry of the sea  
birds round Ailsa rock, which is 'dead asleep,'  
or has failed to take into his soul the music of  
these lines?

After dark vapours have oppress'd our plains  
For a long dreary season, comes a day  
Born of the gentle south, and clears away  
From the sick heavens all unseemly stains.  
The anxious mouth, relieved from its pains,  
Takes as a long-lost right the feel of May.  
The eyelids with the passing coolness play  
Like rose-leaves with the drip of summer rains.  
And calmest thoughts come round us, as of leaves  
Budding, fruit ripening in stillness, autumn suns  
Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves—  
Sweet Sappho's cheek, a sleeping infant's breath,  
The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs,  
A woodland rivulet, a poet's death.

'I do not live in this world alone, but in a  
'thousand worlds,' Keats wrote most truly, and  
truly too may the words which he spoke so re-  
verently of Shakespeare's poetry be said of his  
own;—'it knows no stop in its delight, but  
'"goeth where it listeth," remaining, however, in  
'all men's hearts a perpetual and golden dream.'

But the Sonnets were also the expression of  
some of Keats's truest friendships, and the strong  
personal love and appreciation enshrined in

many of them throw a clear light on the emotional side of his character. Those addressed to Leigh Hunt, to Reynolds, to George Keats, to Kosciusko, to Haydon, are full of warmth and genuine sympathy; while those to Homer, to Spenser, to Chatterton, to Byron, and to Burns, show a power of assimilation and of insight which belongs only to minds of the rarest order.

And the Sonnets lead us even closer to the personality of Keats when they touch his individual life, and reveal to us the conflicting elements which were battling in that sensitive and many-impulsed heart. The one written in 1817, which commences,

When I have fears that I may cease to be,  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,

has now the pathos and sacredness of a fulfilled prophecy. Another, written in 1819, has in it much of the weariness and sorrow which are expressed in the 'Ode to the Nightingale' (the actual words indeed repeat themselves in it, 'Yet 'would I on this very midnight cease'), but it goes beyond the Ode in its passionate intensity, in its loosening hold of life, and realisation of the infinity of death.

Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell,  
No god, no demon of severe response  
Deigns to reply from heaven or from hell.  
Then to my human heart I turn at once.  
Heart! thou and I are here sad and alone;  
I say, why did I laugh? O mortal pain!  
O darkness, darkness; must I ever moan  
To question heaven and hell and heart in vain,  
Why did I laugh? I know this being's lease,  
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads:  
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,  
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;  
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,  
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

In the sonnet commencing

I cry your mercy—pity—love—ay, love—

we get a glimpse of his feeling towards her whom he loved as it has been the lot of few women to be loved, a feeling too sacred to be dragged into the light of common day by any comment even from those who most reverence John Keats.

And it is almost exclusively in the Sonnets that we find direct allusion to that without which no poet is closely linked to his fellow-men—the emotion of religion.

There is a curious silence throughout the poems on the subject of religious *belief*. While

Shelley crusaded against the accepted forms of religion, while Byron in turn rejected and threw new feeling into them, Keats simply ignored them all. It would almost seem as though in the rich and slow development of his mind he had not reached to a consciousness of the religious aspirations of man ; as if the beauty of life had satisfied his imagination so fully, and so wholly occupied it, that this part of his nature still lay dormant, were it not that through 'Endymion' and 'Hyperion' there is a diffused spirituality which gives us even more the impression of a mind liberated from the desire of definite religious expression because permeated with its essence, while the subjects of the poems would necessarily, by their mythological character, exclude the religious beliefs of modern times from being introduced. Our thoughts go back to the expressive allusions in his early poem, 'Sleep and Poetry.'

Sounds which will reach the Framer of all things,  
And die away in ardent mutterings.

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,  
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean  
For his great Maker's presence, but must know  
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow ;



but we look in vain among the shorter poems and the Sonnets for any formal expression of religious belief or controversy with it. We find none, and in only two of the Sonnets is there any marked allusion to it. One of these is the 'Sonnet to Kosciusko,' which ends:—

. Thy name with Alfred's, and the great of yore,  
Gently commingling, gives tremendous birth  
To a loud hymn, that sounds far, far away,  
To where the great God lives for evermore.

And the other is the 'Sonnet on Ben Nevis.'

Read me a lesson, Muse, and speak it loud  
Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist !  
I look into the chasms, and a shroud  
Vaporous doth hide them—just so much I wist  
Mankind do know of hell. I look o'erhead,  
And there is sullen mist—even so much  
Mankind can tell of heaven. Mist is spread  
Before the earth, beneath me—even such,  
Even so vague is man's sight of himself !  
Here are the craggy stones beneath my feet,—  
Thus much I know that, a poor witless elf,  
I tread on them, that all my eye doth meet  
Is mist and crag, not only on this height,  
But in the world of thought and mental might.

This might be taken as an expression of the opinion that 'nothing is provable,' were it not that there are one or two incidental com-

ments in the letters which show us that, however little formulated, there was some wider hope underlying the religious consciousness of Keats.

In writing to tell his brother George of Tom's death, he says : ' I have a firm belief in immortality, and so had Tom. . . . The going on of the world makes me dizzy. . . . Sometimes I imagine an immense separation, and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality. There will be no space, and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other—when they will completely understand each other in different degrees. The higher the degree of good, so higher is our love and friendship.'

Again in writing, in September 1818, to his friend Mr. Bailey, he says : ' You know my ideas about religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is provable. I wish I could enter into all your feelings on the subject merely for one short ten minutes, and give you a page or two to your liking.'

To the Christian religion he makes hardly any allusion, though there is one passage in his letters on 'the disinterested heart of Jesus.'

From all this we may fairly draw the inference that his nature, though essentially a spiritual one, had not crystallised for itself or had transmitted to it any distinct form of religious belief; that he was reticent on the subject, and had not formed any decided opinions; and that, had he lived to be older, his genius would have expressed whatever truth it might have grasped, not within any circumscribed limits, but with that far-reaching power and prophetic insight which enable the spirit to embrace the need of an age beyond its own.

Meanwhile John Keats has left to us the stainless memory of a pure and loving heart, and the fruit of a life which 'worshipped the principle of Beauty in all things,' making clearer for us, by his vast and interpretative thought, the enigmas of human change and joy and grief; while he shows us that to love Beauty is to love Truth, and that when we are spiritualised enough to recognise them, both shall appear to us as one. It is 'the completed form of all

'completeness' for which our spirits have been searching, and we shall know it as Reality.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely. He doth bear  
His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world ; compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear ;  
Torturing the unwilling dross, that checks its flight  
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;  
And bursting in its beauty and its might  
From trees and beasts and men into the heaven's light.







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